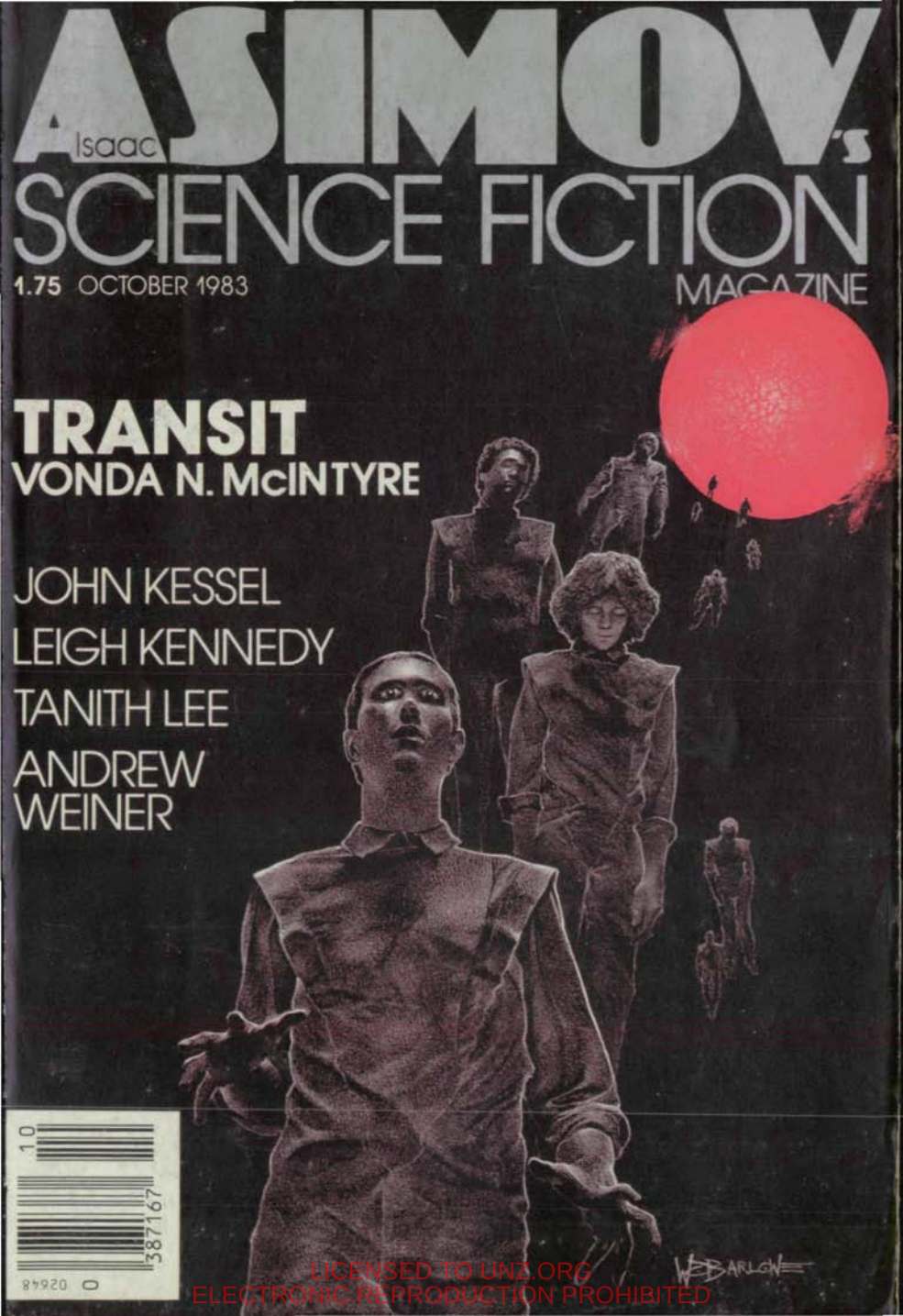

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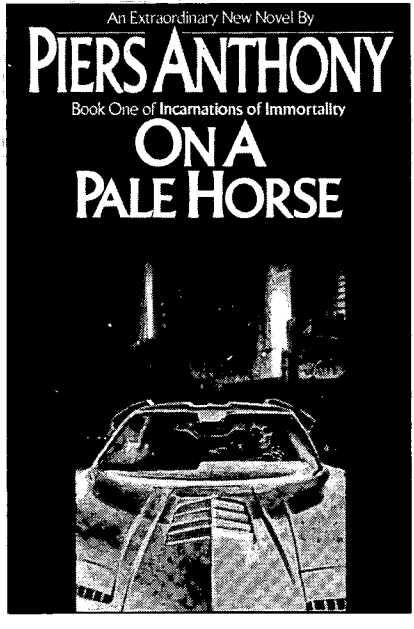

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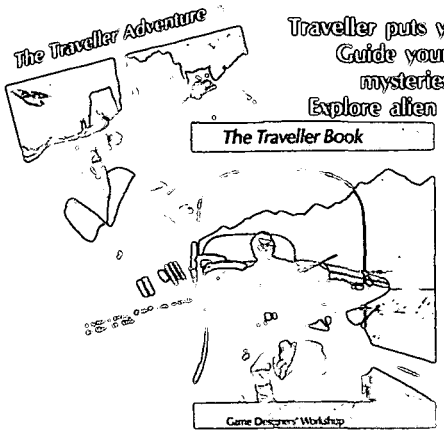

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26

Isaac Asimov's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

Vol. 7 No. 10 (whole no. 70)
October 1983
Next issue on sale
September 27, 1983

Novella

100 Transit _____ Vonda N. McIntyre

Novelette

26 Hearts Do Not In Eyes Shine _____ John Kessel

Short Stories

18 Tethered Purple-Pebble Eaters Martin Gardner
46 Greek _____ Leigh Kennedy
60 Invaders _____ Andrew Weiner
76 Chand Veda _____ Tanith Lee
88 A Shadow Under the Sea _____ Mary R. Gentle

Departments

6 Editorial: My Projects _____ Isaac Asimov
12 Letters _____
22 Gaming _____ Dana Lombardy
166 On Books _____ Baird Searles
178 The SF Conventional Calendar _____ Erwin S. Strauss

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EDITORIAL

MY PROJECTS

by Isaac Asimov

I receive a sizable number of letters asking me what my next book will be, what projects I have in hand, whether I am working on this or that specific opus, and so on. I don't feel that my privacy is being invaded by letters of this sort and I do my best to answer all such questions, even if only by a brief postcard.

The number of such letters is increasing, however, and I see that it will soon reach the level where I simply cannot answer them all—and then I am likely to be forced to answer none of them, out of sheer dislike for playing favorites and answering some but not others. It occurred to me, therefore, to devote an editorial to a discussion of some of the things that are on the griddle, in the perhaps hopeless dream that this will make some of the questioning letters I receive unnecessary. I won't do this often, I assure you, just once in a long while when the pressure gets heavy.

The question I am most asked, of course, now that *Foundation's Edge* is safely published (and having remained on the best-seller list for twenty-five weeks) is "When is the next Foundation novel coming out?"

The answer is: Not for just a little while, please.

I'm sure it was Doubleday's notion, once they saw they had a best-seller going, that I begin a new Foundation novel at once, and they handed me another contract immediately, probably with that in mind. Certainly, that was Janet's feeling, too. Once she finished *Foundation's Edge*, she came to me and said, in her best tone of wifely command, "I want you to start the next novel *right now*."

However, it is one thing to order a book written, and quite another actually to write it. I might as well admit that writing *Foundation's Edge* was not something I did between yawns. It took me nine months of hard work (though it's true it might have taken a little less time if I hadn't been working on a dozen other projects as well) and it rather wore me out. I felt I needed time to let the well of inspiration re-fill.

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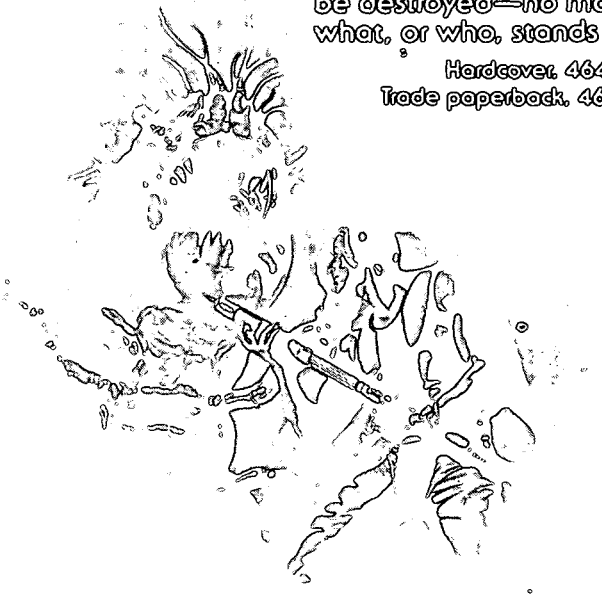

TIMESCAPE

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Besides, now that I had finally acceded to innumerable requests for a continuation of the Foundation series, I felt that I would be bombarded with demands that I complete the "Lije Baley trilogy."

I had, you see, written two novels dealing with the detective Elijah Baley and his robot sidekick, R. Daneel Olivaw. These were *The Caves of Steel* (Doubleday, 1953) and *The Naked Sun* (Doubleday, 1957). The first dealt with a crowded Earth in which human beings far outnumbered robots, and the second dealt with the nearly empty planet, Solaria, in which robots far outnumbered human beings.

Incautiously, I let it be known that I was planning a third novel which would complete the trilogy and which would be set on the planet, Aurora, where human beings and robots achieved a reasonable balance. In 1958, I actually started the third novel and wrote four chapters before bogging down, partly because I was dissatisfied with the plot I had worked out, and partly because (what with Sputnik I) I had become overwhelmingly interested in non-fiction.

So the decades passed and readers grew steadily more insistent on the matter of the third novel. Once the fourth Foundation novel had appeared and was successful, I knew that it would not be safe any longer to try to continue resisting the third Lije Baley novel. I got to work on September 22, 1982, abandoning my earlier effort altogether and taking off in an utterly new direction.

The new novel, *The Robots of Dawn*, is, as planned originally, the tale of Baley and Daneel on the planet, Aurora. On March 28, 1983, the novel was completed and delivered. It is now in press and Doubleday hopes it will be out in the fall of 1983.

The new novel will be longer than either of the first two Lije Baley volumes by a good bit; it will, indeed, be about as long as *Foundation's Edge*.

I cannot possibly guarantee that *The Robots of Dawn* will be as successful as *Foundation's Edge*, but my editors seem enthusiastic about it, and I've worked hard on it. We'll see what happens.

And what comes after that?

Well, the push for two novels, back to back, has forced me to cut down on other work. Specifically, I have had to suspend operations on at least four important non-fiction projects. There is, first, a long overdue revision of *Asimov's Guide to Science* that I am doing for Basic Books; second, there is a massive question-and-answer book on science for Doubleday; third, a book on supernovas for Times Books; and fourth, a two-volume history of the world for Walker. I can't put all of these on the back burner forever. Each of these books has anywhere from 50,000 to 500,000 words done and that's a large

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investment.

Unfortunately, I can't get sympathy from publishers by moaning about all the other work I must do. They tend to be stony-hearted, largely because of my well-known prolificity —which has its hellish side-effects. (I wish I had a best-seller for every time a publisher has brushed aside my sad tale of other commitments and said, "You can just knock that off on a weekend, can't you, Isaac?")

So, if *The Robots of Dawn* does well, I know that Doubleday will keep asking me to knock off the four non-fiction books (including even their own) in four successive weekends and get on with more novels. And I suppose I will have to do at least some thinking about the matter.

Well, if my Gentle Readers don't mind (and how can they stop me?) I would like to do some thinking aloud on the matter.

The next novel I do will, inevitably, have to be a fifth Foundation novel. There will be absolutely no choice in the matter. But what *kind* of Foundation novel?

Consider! So far, all my Foundation stories have been written moving forward in time. The series starts just before Hari Seldon sets up the Foundations, in the year 1 of the Foundation Era (F.E.) and the most recent novel, *Foundation's Edge*, takes place in 498 F.E. Furthermore, this most recent novel ends with a clear indication that there is still some mystery about the long-forgotten birth-planet of the human species, Earth.

The assumption then is that the fifth Foundation novel should continue the story and take up the search for the Earth with all that might entail. Indeed, it had been my casual intention to begin at the precise point where *Foundation's Edge* left off and to continue—though exactly what the nature of the plot is to be in that case, I haven't yet the faintest notion.

Recently, however, it has occurred to me that there is a second alternative. I can do another kind of Foundation novel.

In *Foundation's Edge*, I made a point of referring to various non-Foundation novels of mine and indicating how they might fit into the Foundation universe. (A few of the critics disapproved of this, but I'm darned if I know why. They are my books and I can do as I wish with them, I should think.)

A major embarrassment were the Lije Baley novels which can in no way be fitted into the Foundation Universe. The Lije Baley novels contain societies based on strains of humanity with life-spans of up to four centuries and supported by elaborate systems of robots. The Foundation novels have ordinary short-lived strains of humanity only, and no robots at all.

In *Foundation's Edge*, I fi-

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nally mentioned robots, and in *The Robots of Dawn* I amused myself by letting the plot serve the function of pointing the Lije Baley universe in the direction of the Foundation universe.

Well, then, might it not be possible to write additional novels within the interval between *The Robots of Dawn* and *Foundation*? Might I not have "pre-Foundation" novels?

I could have a novel in which the conversion from the Lije Baley universe to the Foundation universe is half-complete with considerable friction between the two types of societies. I could also have one that takes place still later, in the latter days of the Galactic Empire with Hari Seldon still in the full vigor of early middle age and founding the science of psychohistory. Then, after I have done one or, at most, two of these pre-Foundation novels I can turn back to the sequel of *Foundation's Edge*.

I don't expect any of these novels will be easy to write and every one of them may present me with insurmountable problems when I try to fit them into the framework that already exists, but I keep thinking about it. And if any of the readers have ideas about whether I should move strictly forward, or take some backward steps as well, please let me know.

In the end, I'll have to go my own way, I suppose—but I'd love to hear your opinions just the same. ●

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LETTERS

Dear Dr. Asimov, Shawna, and company,

I was very pleased to see "The Blue Background" by Brian Aldiss in your sixth anniversary issue. (I also found "The Sidon in the Mirror" by Connie Willis especially enjoyable, and the Profile on James Tiptree, Jr. was excellent.) Personally, I found the story a step in the right direction for the magazine. That is, diversity. Dr. Asimov, I understand you have written novels other than science fiction, and factual tomes in many fields of knowledge. This sixth anniversary issue I see as a pleasant reflection of that combination of interests.

I am not saying, however, that I think you should open up to every genre or every type of story. By all means, of course, I want you to remain basically a science fiction magazine. But when you receive an exceptional story, of any kind (that you believe might be interesting to us readers), such as "The Blue Background," I don't think you should reject it because it isn't exactly science fiction (or, *heaven forbid!*, fantasy) by generally accepted definitions—even if it isn't written by Brian Aldiss or another "Big Name."

I realize this letter might bring yelps and hollers from the pure science fiction buffs, and that I am suggesting a possible lessening in volume of the technology oriented stories in your magazine. But what I *most* want to suggest (respectfully) is that you open up the magazine slightly to special stories, other than tightly defined SF (which you have already done, thank you), without making excuses. I suggest that you try to expand the boundaries of science fiction, if that's what it takes. Begin to erase the troublesome borders some people seem to hide behind. I ask you only for high quality fiction, of any kind. I ask not for stories about science, but for stories about humanity.

After all, isn't that what good science fiction is all about?

Sincerely,

Joseph M. Kurtenbach
P.O. Box 216
Greeley, NE 68842

I like diversity, too, but I think I would hesitate to step outside the field except under very *unusual circumstances on* very *infrequent occasions. Once you start, you see, it might become rapidly more common. The camel's nose, you understand.*

—Isaac Asimov

Rather than searching for diversity for its own sake, I like to think I'm searching for excellence—which

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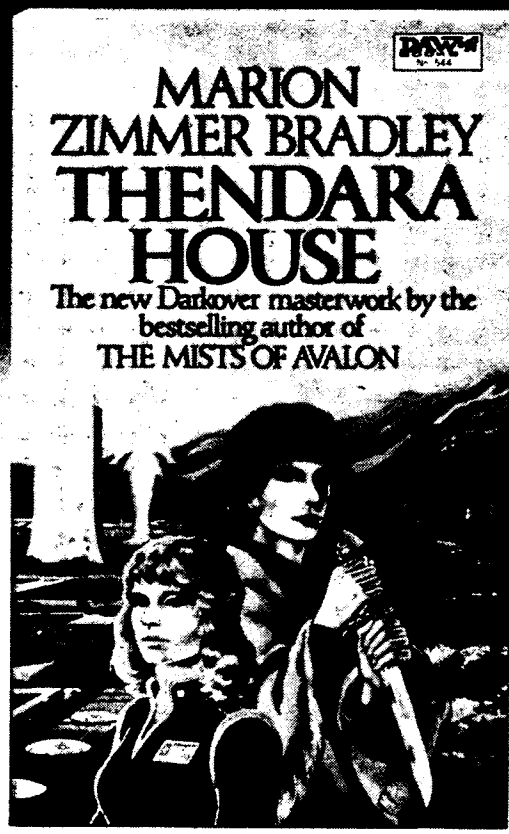

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comes in many shapes.

—Shawna McCarthy

Dear Dr. Asimov:

Many thanks for the Joanna Russ interview in the March, 1983 issue. Russ's work has angered, challenged, and otherwise delighted me since first I gobbled *The Female Man.* As a matter of fact, it was after reading a feminist SF collection that included one of her works that I sat down and wrote my first saleable story, which you very kindly purchased. *IAsfm* deserves a lot of credit not only for rushing in where angels sometimes fear to tread, but for encouraging writers to do the same.

Many thanks also for Steve Perry's "Darts," which appeared in the same issue. I'm sick and tired of SF critics complaining that our genre is limited and limiting. I can think of no other field that allows such range for the imagination, and such depth for the exploration of what it means to be human. Despite literary historians' designation of SF's past as golden and silver, the present seems pretty damn precious in its own right. *IAsfm,* thanks for being there.

Yours sincerely,

Rand B. Lee
Key West, FL

Don't take "golden age" seriously. Everyone has his own. My "golden age" as a reader was the 1930s, as a writer the 1950s, as an SF historian the 1940s. I'm sure that thirty years from now there will be many people who will consider the 1980s to be the "golden age."

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I just received my first issue in the mail. It's superb (but then, I'd expect nothing less from a magazine editorially directed by you)! Although I enjoyed every story, I found Steve Perry's "Darts" to be especially thought-provoking. At first I didn't think I'd like it, but I read on anyway; by the end, I wished it was even longer (and in fact worked out several endings/sequels in my mind)! Perhaps you could use your no-doubt considerable powers of persuasion to entice Mr. Perry to stay away from those novels and write more short stories of this quality—here's one reader who'd certainly enjoy seeing more of his work!

While I'm lavishing praise, Ronald Anthony Cross deserves kudos for *his* story as well. The mag as a whole is wonderful, really the best all-round one I've seen. Keep up the good work—and thank you!

Sincerely,

Daniel D. Strayer
P.O. Box 162
R.R. #2
Continental, OH 45831

My goodness! We make every effort to publish the knocks as well as the boosts, but it's no use trying to deny the fact that we like the boosts much better. Just remember to renew the subscription when the time comes.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Madam,

Thanks for the marvellous little story by Isaac Asimov entitled

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"Potential." It was really fresh, especially when he went back to nature, less so with the computers.

In the Canadian wilderness as a kid, and later in high school, I excelled in mathematics. During my young years I conducted an amazing ESP test and established a matrix in a field. For the next three decades I went selling on the road. I studied no mathematics and was unable to continue my ESP field.

Upon leaving the road I had a yen to go back to mathematics. I also returned to my clairvoyant field. I found a strange thing. My mathematical ability had atrophied almost beyond redemption but my ESP ability was as fresh as ever. The same thing happened in French. Trudeau wants everyone bi-lingual in Canada but I was so rusty I gave it up. Clairvoyance and telepathy do not atrophy.

Dr. Asimov made a real sound point when he intimated that we have special ESP fields. There also are blind spots in a person's ESP spectrum.

I really enjoyed that story.

Sincerely,

C.B. Fisher
Victoria, B.C.

Sometimes I ask myself: Isaac, since you don't for one moment believe in the real existence of extrasensory phenomena, how is it you manage to write about it so convincingly in your stories. To which I answer: Sheer genius, Isaac, sheer genius.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

At the beginning of the Profile of Joanna Russ by Charles Platt it is noted that the Profile "may generate even more controversy." I hope not. If there turns out to be any significant percentage of bigots of any kind in the science fiction community it will cause me considerable heartbreak. The controversy anticipated surely refers to Ms. Russ's statement at the end of her profile that: "Sure I'm a lesbian."

Please, please, science fiction readers, don't disappoint me! Surely the same minds which can assimilate multiple universes, time travel, and alternate dimensions, extraterrestrial intelligences of any or no form can assimilate the fact that humans are diverse in many ways? Just last weekend I attended my first convention, the ConFusion near Ann Arbor, Michigan. I cannot believe that the warmhearted and intelligent people I met there would consider it controversial for a person to be homosexual.

This is my first letter of this sort. Since I have the opportunity I will convey to you that your magazine is consistently of a pleasing quality. Rarely do I put it down, once I pick it up, until every word has been read. Please keep up the good work.

Sincerely and Heterosexually,

Terry Paul Calhoun
Ann Arbor, MI

We're not worried. These days gaiety among the population is met with considerable aplomb. After all, driving them into the closet doesn't put an end to homosexuality, only to a certain amount of happiness.

—Isaac Asimov

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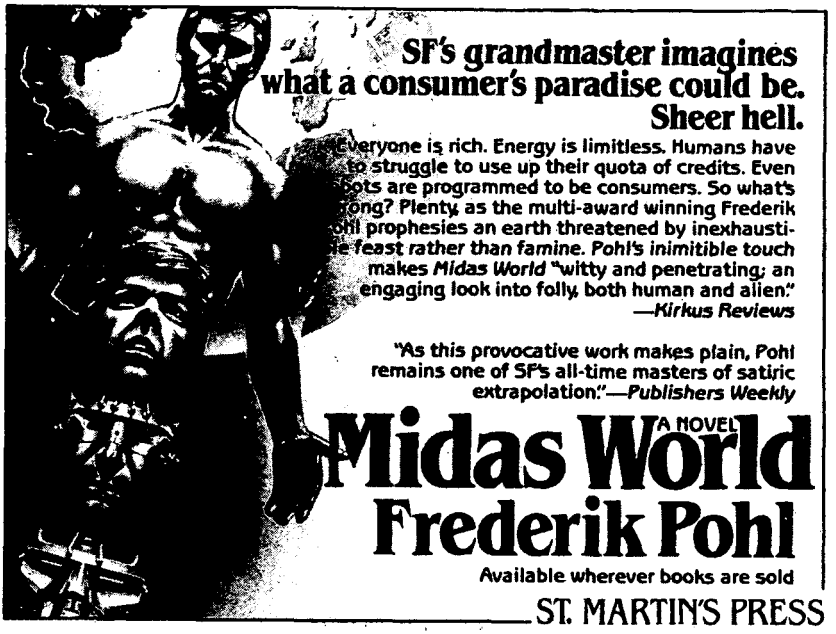
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Dear Editor:

I really appreciate the author profiles like that of Joanna Russ in the March issue, just received. It's most interesting to know more about the people who bring us such reading pleasure.

One point in the Russ profile puzzles me (page 36)—she says she talks to people about socialism, and they ask her what a socialist world would be like—art and literature for example—and her following comment seems to imply that this is a matter for speculation, though she is certain herself it would be better than things are now.

What puzzles me is why anyone would be uncertain about the effects of socialism on art and literature, or anything else for that matter. Surely there are now enough countries operating under socialism, for a long enough time, that we can *see* the effects.

It is a very common theme in SF to design a better world, for we have no trouble at all finding things we would like changed. However, I see no reason to ignore, in that process, the evidence we already have of the real-world experiments that have been made and are being made.

And as to the effects of socialism on art and literature, I feel Solzhenitsyn has said pretty much what there is to be said. No one is obliged to accept his views, but I think they *are* obliged to take a clear, unbiased view for themselves of the experiment that has caused him to comment. John Campbell said many times that theory is nice, but reality is better. The evidence in this case is over-

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whelming. Socialism kills creativity and freedom, not just for the artist, but for all.

Rinehart S. Potts
Glassboro, NJ

Actually, things aren't that simple. Russia, under the Tsarist tyranny, produced some of the world's greatest novels, musical compositions, and art. The golden age of French art and literature was under the Bourbon tyranny. I'm afraid it would be only too easy to show that democracy tends to produce junk. I don't say it does; I just say that creativity is so enormously complex a matter that we had better not set up hard and fast rules too quickly.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I am writing to you to give you a little friendly criticism concerning a few of your stories that have been published in *IAsfm*. Because I have only been reading your fine magazine for a few months, I have few recent stories with which to make comparison, so I am basing my comparison on some of your earlier works, particularly, your stories on robotics, as opposed to your stories about George and Azazel.

As stated before in your Feb. '83 issue by Christopher Gleason, I, too, care little for your George and Azazel stories. The characters show promise, but the plot lines don't. I am at the moment in the midst of reading *The Complete Robot*, and cannot help wondering how the same writer can write so well in one field of SF, and so blandly in another. Your story about Elijah Baley and R. Daneel Olivaw in particular was one of the best I have ever read, by *any* author. I hold the two novels about those two characters in the same reverence. May I suggest that you drop George and Azazel for a while and write some more Robotics stories. Particularly those about Baley and Olivaw, which have become personal favorites.

Thank you for taking the time and trouble to read this.

Yours truly,

Rachel A. Barr

You may be glad to hear that I'm writing a whole new novel about Baley and Daneel. However, I cannot drop my George and Azazel stories. You see, the sad truth is that I like them, and if I can't write what I like then it's not worth being a writer. Of course, Shawna might reject them, but that's another matter.

—Isaac Asimov

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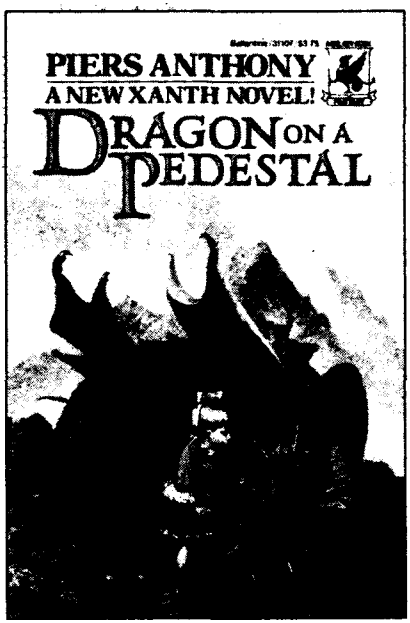

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MARTIN GARDNER

TETHERED PURPLE-PEBBLE EATERS

Back in the mid-twentieth century there was a popular children's riddle that went: What's purple and eats pebbles? Answer: A purple pebble-eater. This month's problems are not about purple pebble-eaters, but about purple-pebble eaters.

The surface of Gillikan, a curious planet discovered by the spaceship *Bagel* on one of its exploratory missions to other solar systems, is completely covered with small purple pebbles. Life on the planet is silicon based. The most intelligent of Gillikan's bizarre animal forms is a small turtle-like creature that lives in a hard gray shell shaped like a perfect cube about three inches on the side. Its intelligence is near that of a squirrel.

When members of the exploring party, led by the *Bagel's* exobiologist Stanley G. Winetree, first saw the gray cubes, they had no idea they were alive. But when Lieutenant Flarp reached down to pick one up, a tiny head, with a perfectly flat top and two black beady eyes, suddenly pushed out from a side of the cube, and emitted a high-pitched growl. Flarp quickly put down the cube. Four legs instantly emerged from the cube's base, and the creature scurried off.

At the spot where the animal had been resting were a number of smaller purple cubes, hard as cement. The explorers later learned that these were the animal's excreta.

"Fantastic!" exclaimed Winetree, slapping his gloved palms against the sides of his helmet. "I can't wait until I get a chance to dissect one of these things."

"You may have to cut it open with a buzz saw," said Flarp.

One of the beasts was eventually captured and taken back to the *Bagel* where it quickly became known as a "turple." The ship's carpenters built a square enclosure on the pebbly ground outside the ship, ten feet on the side, and tethered the turple to one of the corners as shown in Figure 1. The turple at once freed itself by gnawing through the rope. Someone found a steel chain that was too hard for the turple's teeth. An hour later it was feeding

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quietly on the purple pebbles, all rather soft and crumbly.

Now for our first puzzle. Assume that the chain allowed the

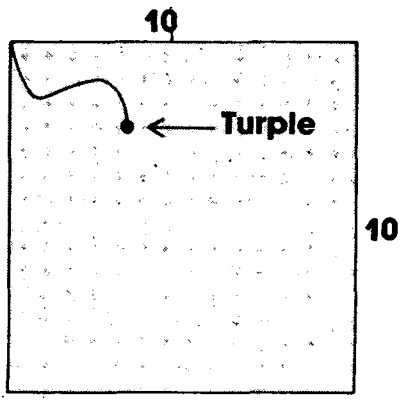

Figure 1

turple to graze over exactly one-fourth of the square field. It can, of course, feed as far as the chain's length. How long is the chain?

Only some elementary geometry is needed, but if you can't figure it out, turn to page 24.

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GAMING

by Dana Lombardy

Here's your chance to be heard about what you like. This month, you, the readers of *IAsfm*, are invited to help determine what kinds of games will appear in this column in future issues, and how they'll be covered.

To participate, send a postcard or letter with your answers to the following 16 quick questions.

The results will help shape this column for 1984. Your opinions will be our guide!

Please answer all 16 questions below using one of three letters—A, B, or C. The letters represent your level of interest in the types of games or subjects that can be covered: **A** = Much interest. **B** = Some interest. **C** = No interest.

Questions that receive the most "A" votes will indicate that you'd like to see more emphasis on that area. A lot of "B" votes shows enough interest to earn occasional coverage.

What subject areas interest you? The first four questions deal with different game areas. For example, there are SF computer games, SF role-playing games, SF board games, etc. You're not excluding any types of games with a negative vote on one of these questions. The purpose of these four questions is to get your preference for how much of each subject area you want covered in the course of a year.

1. Science Fiction
2. Fantasy
3. History
4. Abstract*

*This would include adult strategy games such as chess, backgammon, *Pente*®, etc.

What types of games do you like? Remember that science fiction is a subject used by *all* these games.

5. Role-playing (*Dungeons & Dragons*®, *Traveller*®, etc.)
6. Miniatures (small metal figures used in role-playing games and wargames)
7. Tabletop (board games, card games, etc.)
8. Computer (these work on personal computers, such as Apple, IBM, etc.)
9. Video (Atari, Intellivision, ColecoVision, etc.)

Breadth or depth? Do you want a lot of detail about a game, or do you prefer "thumbnail" sketches of games?

10. Devote entire column to

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just one game.

11. Cover several games in the same issue.

12. Do "how-to-play" type articles with hints and tips on specific games.

Would you like survey reports? These can be interesting, but since space is limited, only brief descriptions are possible.

13. Award winners (each year, at least one set of major awards for games is given)

14. New releases (most games are announced or introduced at a couple of major conventions/ shows)

15. Game conventions (an events-calendar once or twice a year telling where you can go to find other gamers and new games)

16. Magazines and books on games.

Your comments, please. If there's still room left on your card or letter, please add any comments on what you like or don't like about the column. Again, your opinion is important.

Where to write. Send a postcard or letter with your A, B, or C answers next to numbers 1 through 16 to: Dana Lombardy, 8418 McKenzie Circle, Manassas, VA 22110. Deadline for your answers is Friday, October 14, 1983. ●

MARTIN GARDNER (from page 21)

SOLUTION TO TETHERED PURPLE-PEBBLE EATERS

The turple can graze over the quadrant of a circle with an area of 25 square feet—one fourth of the square's area of 100 square feet. The full circle, with the chain's length as its radius, will have an area of 100 square feet. The area of a circle, as everyone should know, is pi times the square of the radius. To obtain the radius we need only divide 100 by pi, then find the square root of the result. This gives the length of the chain as very close to 5.64 feet.

The turple chomped pebbles so rapidly that it was necessary to shift it to other corners of the enclosure, and finally to tether it to the *outside* of a corner, using a longer chain. The feeding provided the crew with dozens of little purple cubes, all identical. One of the mechanics turned a set of them into a handsome beaded necklace for one of the ship's nurses.

The new tether was 20 feet long. You should have little difficulty determining the new grazing area. How to calculate it is explained on page 59.

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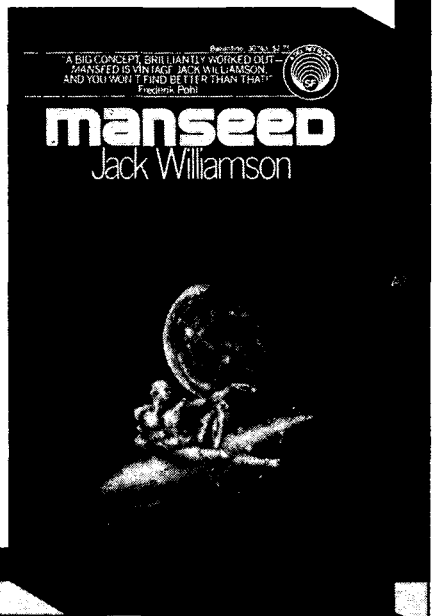

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HEARTS DO NOT IN EYES SHINE

art: Linda Burr

by John Kessel

The author, who lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, recently won the 1983 Nebula Award for Best Novella for "Another Orphan." His work has appeared in *Fantasy & Science Fiction, New Dimensions, The Berkley Showcase*, and several other publications. This is his first appearance in *IAsfm*, but we hope to see a great deal more of him.

Connie found Harry in the bar at Mario's. He saw her come in, finished his drink quickly and stood up.

"You came," he said, fumbling in his jacket pocket as if he'd lost something. "I have something for you."

He found a small envelope in an inside pocket and handed it to her; it felt like a card. "Don't open it now," he said. "Wait until later."

Connie felt strangely calm. "Okay. Let's eat."

She let him do most of the talking; he seemed to have marshalled his arguments. "I know this must seem like a crazy idea. I think I'm half crazy to suggest it, but people do it all the time and I couldn't let you go without trying something."

"You're not letting me go. You let me go a long time ago."

He pulled at his lower lip and sat silent. "You're right. I don't deny it . . ."

"You can't."

"Please . . . I know I've made mistakes; we've both made mistakes. But think about the way we felt about each other when we first met. The emotions then were real. You can't deny that. That's

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why I'm here asking this, even though I know I don't deserve to ask it. But in the last month or two, I've about gone crazy thinking about the good times we spent together."

Connie tried to stay calm, to think rationally. "Harry, why do we have to go through this? It's too hard. I remember other times. We wouldn't be separated otherwise."

"No. I think you're wrong there. We made mistakes and did things to hurt each other, but I've thought about it a lot—I've hardly thought about anything else—and I know, I *know* we are basically compatible. I knew that the first time I saw you. The things that have pushed us apart are only things that happened to us—they aren't who we are. Who we are doesn't change, and that's the whole point of getting erased. We stay the same people, but we get rid of the bad things that happened and get another chance to build our marriage up again. Please, Connie. You know this is the truth, don't you?"

She didn't know anything. She sipped her wine, sat back and watched him.

Harry seemed uncomfortable under her gaze. He closed his eyes, breathed deeply, opened them again. That was always the sign of his exasperation with her, when he couldn't get her to believe what he wanted, when the words failed him. The words had not failed him yet. He must have thought them up a long time before he had the nerve to call her. Perhaps the letter from her lawyer had jolted him. Perhaps the erasure clinic had given him the arguments he was using on her. That was something she would never have suspected of Harry in the early days; she would have taken him at his face value.

Connie must have smiled at her own cynicism: he looked at her angrily and said, "Don't laugh at me Connie."

"I'm sorry."

"That's okay. Just don't laugh."

There wasn't much trust left in her, and suddenly she realized that she did not like it. What had he done to her that she had come to be so suspicious, that the honesty of her emotions had been leached away until she responded to him as if he were a pitchman for a sex show? Maybe his exasperation—if it was exasperation, and not just fear or confusion—had a reason.

"I don't know, Harry. I'm afraid. You've hurt me too much, and I can never forget the things you've done."

He leaned forward. "That's right," he said quietly. "But they can make us forget. You don't have to give up anything. You just have to be willing to take a chance."

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She played with the card he had given her, turned it over, ran her index finger along the edge of the smooth rectangle of cream-colored paper.

"I don't know," she said.

Harry looked hurt; the silence stretched. "Look, Connie, maybe this was a bad idea. Don't make me feel any more a fool than I am."

"I'm not making you a fool." God. The last thing she wanted was to feel sorry for him.

"I'm sorry I tried to make you do something you didn't want to do. Can you blame me for trying?" He looked at her levelly.

This was not going the way it ought to have. They ought not to let men like Harry live to reach twenty-one. They ought to test them when they hit puberty, and if the test showed a person wouldn't be able to tell if he was telling the truth or not, they could castrate him. While they were at it they could get rid of the ones with Harry's green eyes and Harry's voice.

She held up the card and stood to leave. "Can I open this now?"

He smiled a little sadly. "It doesn't say 'I love you.' "

Connie slid a fingernail under the flap and opened the envelope. The front of the card was blank, and inside was written, "No matter what you decide, I will never lie to you again."

She put the card back in the envelope, put the envelope into her purse. At his station, the maitre d' had already cleared their table on his service screen and was watching them impatiently. Connie looked at him, looked at Harry, and sat down again.

She told Harry she would call him later and returned to the office without having made up her mind. She spent that afternoon trading foreign currencies, with Fox, her computer trading model, hooked into her left ear and the newsline into her right. She stayed in front of the terminal without a break until the session ended, then retreated to her office to take client calls until most of the staff had left for the day.

The lowering clouds that threatened Connie and the other bicyclists riding home suggested that perhaps the streetcar would have been a better idea that morning. But the rain held off until after she reached her street. She lived in a large old house in a neighborhood that had declined to a near-slum in the third quarter of the century only to be refurbished in the eighties before its second genteel slide after the turn of the century. Harry and Connie had moved into the white frame monstrosity a year before they contracted; seven years later he had moved out, and it had

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taken her months to feel comfortable again there after a period of rattling around its twelve rooms like the drunkard in the random walk theorem.

That night a relapse threatened. In the mail printout she found a brochure for an erasure company, New Life Choices, Inc. She did not recognize the name. Harry had to have sent it; she threw it into the wastebasket without reading it. She skipped supper, fixed several stiff drinks and tried to forget about erasure. She walked through the house listening to the spring drizzle and breathing deep the humid air that blew through opened windows. She picked up her clothes from about the bedroom, did the laundry, had a couple more drinks, smoked a joint, tried to read a book. She sat by the phone for twenty minutes, then dialed Harry's number quickly to tell him to forget it. The face of a middle-aged woman came onto the screen and told her curtly she had the wrong number. She hesitated, then searched the wastebasket for the brochure.

FREEDOM IS A STATE OF MIND

The immortal bard, William Shakespeare (1564–1616) asked,

Can you cure a troubled mind,
Plunge a deep sorrow out of the memory
Erase the troubles written on a brain
And with a sweet potion
Clean all the pain and sadness
From a heavy heart?

—At New Life Choices, we can.

The next page told Connie:

We see the world through dark glass. By selective forgetting, we can take off the dark glasses that superimpose the fearful past upon the present, and begin to know that love is forever present. The Jacobovsky Process is used to selectively edit the memory. Forgiveness then becomes a process of letting go of whatever we thought others may have done to us, or whatever we may think we have done to others. Our safety and security are the simple words, "I don't remember."

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Harry had been bright and moody and could make her laugh whenever he wanted. Connie remembered quite well.

She had loved to watch him fix things. He had beautiful hands, strong and skilled. His hands knew just how much force to give, could feel out the source of a problem without his having to think about it. Normally he was a talkative man who did not use words well, but when he was in the converted playroom in the attic he became a quiet one, concentrating on the task before him, devoted only to finding the solution to the problem; patient, intuitive. His eyes would sober, without the anger they would show during his depressions, and he would look at the machine as if somehow, if he waited in the right way, it might speak to him—and he would not be surprised when it did.

Harry had had that look for her, at first. She felt that when she spoke to him, he listened with all his substance. It made her want to say only true things—not to be silly or lie. He would laugh at her when she got so serious.

"You act like I might go away," he would say to her. "I won't go away."

Harry worked for Triangle Data Services. Connie had met him when he came in to replace their old computer trading link with the new Triangle system. He seemed unaware of the class difference between a workman like himself and someone like Connie, with a couple of degrees in economics and a triple-A credit rating. He did not seem self-conscious hanging around their terminals watching, asking an occasional question. Strangely, the changeover was made without disrupting their work, and when on his way out of the building on his last day there Harry stopped to ask Connie out for dinner, she had surprised herself by saying yes.

The rain increased from a drizzle to a downpour, and Connie went through the house again, closing windows against the storm. She turned out all the lights and went to bed.

Harry had lied to her more than once. They'd lived together so naturally in that first year that it had amazed her she'd been able to live alone for so long. It was an open marriage, with disclosure, ten years and an option, with penalties for a breach on either side. Three years into it Connie realized that Harry saw other women without telling her. At first she said nothing, out of love, or perhaps fear that facing it would make the truth of his betrayal undeniable. Why should he keep his lovers a secret when she had agreed to accept anything he told her openly? She did not see herself as the jealous spouse, but keeping her knowledge to herself

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only made her anger and resentment grow. When at last she confronted him, Harry was unsurprised that she knew. He would have felt ashamed to tell her of those affairs even though it was okay to have them, he said. He still loved her, he said. It had nothing to do with her, he said.

Though it took her years more to realize it, it *had* nothing to do with her. It was not her fault, and whether or not it was Harry's was beyond her. She tried not to care. She just wanted to be done with trying to understand him when he did not understand her, done with his talk that never went anywhere and his silence that left her out, done with the fighting, his sudden joys and kindnesses, his silly jokes, his casual cruelty, his quiet eyes and calm hands, his lies, the pain of watching him and knowing that she loved and hated him. She might have done better, but it was not her fault.

Why did that sound too easy?

The rain was beating heavily on the roof now, punctuated by thunder and lightning whose flashes brought the darkened room into momentary sharp relief, like sudden memories. Connie realized that the windows in the playroom were probably open. She got her robe and went up the narrow stairs.

The lamp over Harry's workbench did not come on when she flipped the switch. The curtains of the west window snapped with the force of the strong, cold wind, and the rain blew well into the middle of the cluttered room. Like a person walking a tightrope, Connie stepped carefully between the broken machines with their spoor of dismantled parts. It was all that Harry had left when she'd kicked him out, and she had threatened more than once to throw all his toys away if he did not move them. Her feet were very cold. The window was stuck; the counterweights in the frame scraped and the pulleys squeaked as she leaned heavily on it. The window went down crookedly, one side fighting the other. She beat on the top with her fist, growing angrier and angrier as it inched its stubborn way down. The wind whistled as the gap closed, she became soaked with the rain, and the shadowed forms of Harry's machines watched impassively as she struggled. There was still a gap when she gave up, two inches at one end and one at the other, uneven, hopelessly jammed, the wind louder as it shot through the narrow slit, the curtains flapping fitfully. She sat on the floor crying. It was Harry's damned window, and Connie couldn't close it for him.

She found herself in the lobby of New Life Choices on a day

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she and Harry picked for the erasing. Connie would have been more comfortable with the dignified conservatism of Associated or Stratford: the walls of the New Life lobby were knotty pine hung with Miro prints; the receptionist had had his irises silvered in the latest nihilist style. Some people might have liked it.

She and Harry sat quietly together until one of the "counselors" came to greet them.

"Harry." He shook hands. "Good to see you again. I see you've persuaded her." He turned to Connie. "You've made the right decision, Constance. I'm John Holland. Call me John."

He insisted on shaking her hand as well, holding on a moment as if to reassure her of his sincerity. It was all she could do to keep him from putting his arm across her shoulder as he led them to his office.

Behind his desk he was more businesslike. "First of all, are you taking advantage of the special this week?"

Harry looked pained, glanced briefly at Connie, then took the coupon from his pocket. "No jokes about paying in advance, John. Let's get on with it."

"We have to do this by the book, Harry. It's not so unpleasant as all that, is it? You two are about to get a second chance, thanks to the service we're offering. People throughout history have longed for that chance. They've gone to their graves dreaming of it, they've killed each other and themselves because they couldn't get it. Now you can have it; think how blessed you are."

He drew two contracts from a desk drawer. "I myself have had numerous traumas erased," he continued. "So completely that the only way I know about them is that I kept records. My mother's death. The time I struck out with the bases loaded in the college world series. My baptism. I can talk frankly about these things now, without a trace of guilt or anger, because for me those events no longer exist. The people who hurt me no longer exist. Fifty years ago a psychiatrist might treat you for a decade trying to convince you that the past is over and can't hurt you. By this afternoon the past that hangs over both of you like a cloud—I can see it there now, and it's keeping you apart—will be gone. All that will be left will be the love you still feel for each other."

Connie wondered whether they would erase this meeting for no extra charge. Harry looked as if he wanted to die. Connie could almost believe Holland was taking some perverse pleasure in Harry's discomfort. Or perhaps this was part of the treatment: make the patient realize the significance of the step he was taking, magnify the pain of the events he wanted to have erased so that

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he would leap at the opportunity to have them expunged. If so, then Holland ought to be able to afford a better wardrobe.

Holland placed one contract before each of them and they talked for awhile about what memories they wanted to have erased, and longer about exactly what they wanted to remember of their time together. He assured Connie, as had the brochure, that she would lose no memories vital to her job. She would remember the difference between short covering and profit taking. If she had been a champion skiier, then she would remain one.

They signed the contracts. Harry took her hand and they were led to the preparation rooms for pre-testing of memory. His palm was sweaty. In another room they were greeted by attendants whom Holland briefed, though they had all the relevant facts in their computer. Harry embraced her and they were taken to separate rooms. Once alone she began to panic. The machine they hooked her up to smelled of the hundreds of others who had come before her to have their pasts negated. The headset that let them map her cortex was cold and hard. The technicians did not know her; they did not care who she was and it would not matter to them if by some mischance they wiped out her personality entirely. It was all the same. Harry had no right to do this to her. She couldn't remember anything about him that would make her want to go back. She started to speak, she started to sit up and take the headset off. Or did she just think that? Harry had no right to take away her memories. She felt sleepy; the room did not look so threatening. The clean smell of disinfectant reminded her of the hospital emergency room where she'd taken Harry after he'd cut his hand so badly carrying a video display across the playroom. That was a piece of junk. It was still up there. He simply had no right.

Connie got a call at work the next day. She asked Mary to keep an eye on forex trading and went to her office to use the viewphone.

"Constance, this is Harry," the man on the screen said, as if she could not see him. When she didn't answer immediately, he added, "Harry Gray."

Her pulse quickened. "Yes, I remember you."

He closed his eyes for a beat, opened them again. His hair was light brown, worn longer than the general style. He seemed to be trying to smile, but uncertain how she would take it. This was her husband, she thought. They stared at each other, uncomfortable.

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"Long time no see," Harry said.

She laughed. He looked so timid, yet aware of the absurdity.

"I feel funny talking to you," he said. "You look vaguely familiar . . ." She repressed another laugh. " . . . but I feel like I'm imposing where I don't know what to say. Maybe we ought to wait awhile."

"No," she said suddenly, surprising herself. "I think we need to get to know each other. Why don't we meet for lunch? Do you know where Mario's is on 12th Street?"

He looked momentarily dazed, and then the smile came. "It's one of my favorites."

She liked his voice, his tentativeness. "Mine too," she said. She realized then that her memories of Mario's were in some particulars rather vague. She could remember the maitre d's name, and that the veal was the best thing on the menu, but she could not recall many specific visits to the restaurant.

The maitre d' knew them both: he gave them a secluded table. The conversation started tentatively. Connie hesitated to ask Harry if he remembered anything, while at the same time she was probing her own memory. She could recall no event that they had experienced together. The closest she came were curious half-memories of things she had done herself that did not seem complete, undoubtedly because Harry had been involved in some way. Holland had told her, in the post-testing, that she might lose memory of persons and things she strongly associated with Harry. Connie wasn't sure she wanted to speculate about their marriage. That was what they had gone to the clinic to forget. But listening to Harry Gray's self-deprecating little jokes, his warm voice, she could not help but realize that she had had some reason to have this man erased from her memory, and she wondered what that reason was.

Harry told her he worked for a communications firm; she recognized it as the company that leased the trading machines to her brokerage. She told him about commission trading in the foreign exchange markets. He seemed legitimately interested. He was not a good talker—he would lose the train of his thoughts in mid-sentence—but his attention to her seemed complete. He told her about his own family and upbringing. In the back of her mind she knew she had to have known all of this as recently as a day ago, but it was all new to her now. It was queer that they could say how they'd been employed for the last five years, who their friends were, discuss recent politics and films, discover they both

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had a passion for weightless vacations, and yet not know how long they had lived together.

They sat at the table long after the meal, ordered wine and talked. Harry's eyes were shy, and kind. He put his hand out to touch hers. They leaned forward in the light of the candle wrapped in plastic netting at the center of their table. He offered her some Lift; she declined, and he added a few drops to his own glass. Connie did not approve, but he did not seem to lose interest and his eyes remained bright and alert. She wondered how often they'd slept together.

When they were about to leave he offered to take her home. She thought that meant he had his own vehicle, but all he meant was that he'd ride the streetcar back with her. She wasn't sure she wanted to go that fast, knowing he would want to spend the night. Connie hesitated while the waiter took her credit matrix. Harry said nothing. Looking into her purse to avoid his expectant gaze, she found a small card tucked into one of the pockets. She pulled it out far enough to read, in handwriting not her own: "No matter what you decide, I will never lie to you again."

She slid it back into her purse.

"Okay," she said. "It's a cool evening. It'll be a nice ride."

Connie grew to know and like him. Soon he moved in with her; in the evenings he took to tinkering with his machines in the playroom. Connie found herself with new energy in her work. She had her mind right on the edge of trading, was able to get in and out of market positions before others in the electronic network even knew they had been established or were crumbling. She began trading for her own account in spare moments and made a killing when the Philippines exploded its first nuclear device and the yen dropped the limit. Harry and Connie talked about how to spend the windfall. They decided on an orbital vacation on Habitat Three.

In the weeks before they left, some things about Harry began to pluck at the edges of Connie's contentment. At times he seemed too happy: too desperately happy. He would take her hands in his and tell her how much he loved her, and the next day would return late from work and Lifted almost out of sight. He would never criticize her and he always seemed more than contented, but sometimes she wondered if Harry was actually seeing her, or only some projection of his own desire. When he became aware of her moments of silence in the midst of their new happiness, he

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begged her not to dwell on the past. How could she dwell on a past she couldn't remember?

On a hot July day one of Harry's friends came by in a company electric van and took them to the tube station where they boarded the magnetic train for the Cape. They spent three days in the hotel on the beach, swimming and sailing and eating seafood, a luxury they seldom saw in the Midwest. After that they took the shuttle up to the resort.

They went to the free fall ballet and did some dancing of their own. They spent hours in the transparent centrifugal pool, watching the universe wheel in lazy circles below them as they swam low-G arabesques in the water. Beneath the observation dome Connie got a very nice tan despite the ultraviolet screen that protected them from the hard sunlight of the vacuum. They ate in the many restaurants and watched the intricate exchange of partners, the formation and deformation of couples and groups that took place in the bar every night. Few of the guests were paired as strongly as Connie and Harry, and soon the propositions ended. Making love in free fall was familiar to Connie, but one of those experiences of which her memory would yield no details. Somehow this comforted her. She knew the reason for this was the forgotten knowledge that Harry had been her partner.

At the end of the first week, Connie met a woman in the lounge who was vaguely familiar. She wore the uniform of one of the staff.

"Hello! I saw Harry this afternoon in the sauna. He told me you were back again. I'm so glad to see you."

Connie could not place her. The woman had obviously spent considerable time with both of them on a previous trip. The name "Alice" presented itself to her, unbidden.

"Alice. How are you?" she said uncertainly.

Alice smiled. "Oh, I can see you must have been Lifted pretty high last night. A little hung over?"

"Not really. It's been a long time since I've seen you."

Alice would not accept that and continued probing until Connie admitted she'd been erased.

"Erased! How interesting! I wonder why Harry didn't tell me."

Given Alice's apparent nose for news it was not something Connie would have told her either. "Maybe it just didn't occur to him."

"But I asked him all about you. We rehashed old times. You look like you're doing better on the sunburn front now. Harry

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said you'd learned your lesson after that horrible burn you picked up last time when you fell asleep."

Connie remembered the sunburn. But as Alice rambled on, the thought nagged at her.

"Harry talked with you about my sunburn? From the last trip?"

"Just in passing. He said you'd vowed never to let anything like that put you in the hospital again."

"You talked about our last trip?"

Alice looked puzzled. "Dear heart, you must be a little strung out. You're sure you didn't do a little too much last night?"

Alice kept the puzzled expression as Connie made her excuses and quickly left. She found Harry in their suite, adjusting his jewelry in the mirror. "Hi," he said. "Am I late? I was just about to come down to the lounge."

She watched his eyes in the mirror. "I ran into Alice," she said.

His glance caught hers, then shifted away. He brushed his hair back from his earring. "I saw her today, too. I'm surprised we didn't run into her sooner; you know how nosey she is. She just lives to know what's going on among the guests."

"I didn't remember her."

"Oh." He turned from the mirror. "You must have associated her with me more than I connected her with you, so the erasing wiped her out of your memory. John told me this might happen."

"You and John are pretty friendly."

He came over to her, embraced her, ran his hand lightly down her spine.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

He sounded perfectly sincere. He did not seem to be afraid to look at her. She ought to just let it go at that. She remembered the card she still carried in her purse. "I will never lie to you again" meant that, although she could not remember, he had lied to her before.

"Alice said you talked about my sunburn."

"She brought it up, yes." Harry sounded as if he didn't understand what she was driving at.

"You remembered?"

A light seemed to dawn on him. "No. No, I didn't remember anything about it. When she brought that up it was all I could do to figure out what she was talking about."

"You acted as if you knew."

"I must be a better actor than I imagine, then." He laughed; he moved away. "Connie, I just didn't want to admit that I'd been erased. You must have felt the same way when she started talking

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to you. She's a gossip. She acted as if we were old friends, so I pretended to remember all the stuff she was talking about. I was embarrassed."

She watched him as he sat down on the edge of the bed and played with his wedding ring, turning it around and around his finger. "Why are you so suspicious?" Harry asked.

He had not been erased. Connie watched him sitting there and knew it was true. She shuddered with the enormity of it. She felt drugged, unable to grasp so huge a betrayal. She stared at him: how could he conceive of such an evil? She wanted to kill him. She rushed into the bathroom and closed the door. She sat on the edge of the tub and put her head in her hands, attempting to slow her breathing. Harry didn't come to the door, he didn't ask her what was wrong, he didn't plead. Stand and fight, her mind screamed, but as the minutes passed with still no response from him she began to have second thoughts. She couldn't know what he thought; she only had herself. The truth was that she *was* suspicious. The whole point of erasure was to give yourself a second chance. Maybe she had no reason to jump to such a drastic conclusion from such slim evidence.

The pastel tile of the floor gave no reassurance. The shock faded. Harry could not be such a monster. He could not have coldly tricked her into giving herself away so unawares; he was not so clever or heartless or selfish as to steal a second chance for himself without paying in equal coin. The card in her purse was—had to be—a voucher of his love for her, not a warning of his unreliability.

She opened the door. Still sitting on the bed, he looked up expectantly. "Are you all right?" he asked.

"Yes." She felt as if she were a ventriloquist speaking through a dummy.

"You have to believe me. I didn't know you'd take it this way. I lied to her; I didn't lie to you."

She sat beside him.

"Sometimes I wonder what made us get erased, too," he said.

She held him tightly and rested her head, eyes closed, on his shoulder.

"Go ahead," Harry said. "Sleep with Alice. I don't care."

A laugh forced itself to her lips. Tears were in her eyes. "Let's forget it," she said.

Constance told Harry she was concerned about being away from the markets for so long. He suggested she arrange a private com-

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link through the resort by which she could transact her business as well as she might at home. She told him she would not feel comfortable because such a link could easily be tapped, and moreover that her clients would have trouble reaching her.

At home they settled into a routine that left them less time with each other. Connie took on several new accounts that kept her busy in the office after the trading session ended each day, and she began working on a new economic model she wanted to merge into Fox. Harry had risen among the ranks of troubleshooters and was being sent out of town frequently to train people in other cities. When home, he spent more time in the playroom. On the surface everything was all right.

The one area of their lives that improved was sex. Harry seemed to want her more as the weeks went by, and for her part, Connie found herself trembling at his touch. She told herself she did not like being attacked with such energy; it was almost as if she were an object to him in those moments of frenzy, but his attention would be focused on her. He asked her continually what she wanted, he would be by turns rough and extraordinarily tender, as if she were as evanescent as snow in late spring, fallen way past its time, beautiful, transitory. She could ask him to do anything, and he would do it. His warm breath on her lips, her shoulder, was like the light, mysterious breath of a cat. She could no more read his thoughts than she could a cat's, yet she suspected something of the same feral blankness behind the eyes that gleamed in the darkness of their bedroom.

She responded with the same passion, surrendering thought in the night as she could less and less give it up during the day. The farther she drifted from him, the more pleasure she took in their lovemaking. *I'll never lie to you again.* She had thrown away the card the day they had returned to Earth, but it would not go away, and eventually she took an afternoon off and went to the office of New Life Choices.

Holland was busy and would be all afternoon, they told her, but she insisted on waiting. Ten minutes later he came out to the lobby and escorted her to his office.

"How can I help you, Constance?"

"I want to see your copies of the contracts."

He got them. She examined Harry's. Everything was in order. She compared the signature with one she had from their marriage license; it was the same. The terms of Harry's contract were identical to hers. Holland watched her silently.

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"Something bothering you?" he asked when she put the papers down.

"Did you know Harry before we came here to be erased?"

"Not well. We met at a party a couple of months earlier. Had a few drinks. He was pretty broken up about your separation."

"You didn't talk business then?"

Holland seemed calm. "I suggested he get erased. It's my business, and he seemed a good prospect. It was a surprise to me later when he told me he was asking you to do it too."

Harry had asked *her* to get erased. For the first time Connie understood that it had not been her idea.

"That's all there was to it? And you erased him when you did me?"

Holland leaned back and frowned. "I know you don't like me," he said. "That's too bad. But you're not the first person to come in here accusing us of some fraud or other. They come in and tell me we didn't really erase them, that they can remember everything they paid to have wiped out. Or that we erased too much. Or that their personality's changed. Or that they can't do their jobs. You name it.

"You think I erased you and not Harry. How long do you think we could stay in business if that's true? There are laws. There are ethics of the business."

Connie almost laughed. "Ethics."

Holland did not get indignant. "Believe it or not. We did the job we were paid to do."

"That's an equivocal statement."

"We erased Harry Gray. You're married to him. Why don't you ask him?"

"Suppose he changed his mind on the couch, at the last minute?"

"I'm not lying to you."

"That's what Harry says."

"So you did ask him?"

Connie didn't say anything. Holland was not the lightweight she had taken him for, or maybe he had practiced this conversation. Some palm readers, they said, even believed the predictions they made.

"Look," Holland said. "You're smart. I'll tell you something I've found out that I don't like to admit. We can erase the memories—'Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow.' That's no problem. I used to think that we could 'minister to a mind diseased.' I'm not so sure anymore. The thing that makes a troubled memory is whatever happens to you. But people aren't as innocent as I

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used to think; they aren't just victims. Lots of the things that just 'happened to them' they worked long and hard to get themselves into."

Connie stood. "Don't preach to me."

"We can't change the person. If you don't trust Harry, it's likely you didn't trust him before you were erased. Erasure doesn't change who you are. No matter what we advertise."

"It didn't change Harry."

" 'Therein the patient must minister to himself.' I'd like to take you out for a drink, Constance, but if you're going to keep this up you might as well just talk to our lawyers."

"I'll bet they're good ones. Do they read Shakespeare?"

Holland gestured at the door. "Too bad," he said. "We might have had a nice time."

Harry had persuaded her to get erased. Connie could not put that thought away. It had been like a suicide pact. They had agreed to kill their memories together. But if Harry had not gone through with it, while Connie did—he had murdered her.

She had lunch with her lawyer, Barbara Curran. The weather had turned cold that morning and the first real autumn storm threatened, so they met at the seafood bar below Center City. Connie told Barbara about her suspicions and the visit to New Life. Barbara told her that no erasure company had ever been proved to have defaulted on a contract, a record of which the industry was so protective that the American Erasure Association had established a huge legal defense fund. Several suits were nonetheless pending. Then Barbara suggested that Connie perhaps ought to have gone through with the divorce she had planned, instead of deciding to get erased. Divorce. Connie felt as if someone had slapped her. Seeing how upset she was, after a little hesitation Barbara gave her a brief history of the marriage as Connie had told it to her a year earlier.

Harry was waiting in her office when Connie returned to the brokerage that afternoon. The other dealers were trying not to look curious.

"Harry. What brings you here?" She hung up her coat, trying to avoid his stare.

"I ran into John Holland today."

"Yes?"

"Why are you going around behind my back like this, Connie? If you've got some problem with the way things are going, why don't you tell me?"

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She sat down behind her desk. "I don't have any problems."

He blew up. "Don't jerk me around, Connie! You think I'm stupid? What do you think Holland told me? You think I didn't go through with erasure, don't you? What kind of bastard do you take me for?"

Through the window that faced the trading room she could see the agents' faces turn toward the office.

"Don't shout. Draw the curtains."

"Screw the curtains! I want to know what's going on in that head of yours."

"That's a first. You never seemed to care much before. You wanted me to wipe out what's in my head. You want it now."

He paced back and forth before the window, hands knotted behind his back. "That's not fair," he said more quietly.

She felt vulnerable. "Maybe it's not. This has been a rough time for me. I can't help wondering about what things were like before I was erased."

"How would I know? Hasn't it been good since? Why rake up the past?"

"I can't change the past, Harry. It happened."

"What do you mean? Why would we get erased if not to change it?"

"So you did get erased?"

He stopped pacing and looked at her. The silence became uncomfortable. She wouldn't wilt under that stare anymore. He closed his eyes, opened them again.

"That question doesn't deserve an answer," he said. "I'm your husband."

Now she was mad. "I'm your wife. I deserve the truth."

He sat down in the chair meant for her clients. "You really hate me, don't you?"

"You lied to me before. I have to know that you're not lying again."

Harry seemed to relax. It was a comfortable chair—she always treated her clients well.

"I love you," he said. "I've always loved you."

"That's not enough. I have to know the truth."

Instead of rushing to reassure her, he sat in the chair as if he had come there to talk about investing in commodity options. His sudden withdrawal from her left Connie off balance, as if a door she had been pushing against had been suddenly opened.

"Say something, Harry. For God's sake."

"Would you believe me if I said yes, I was erased?"

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She hesitated: "I think so."

"Yes, I was erased. I don't remember any lies. Now what happens the next time I don't do what you want? The next time I let you down?"

Connie felt dizzy. "I don't know. We'll have to see. It's not that simple . . ."

"You can explain it to me sometime." Harry shuddered visibly. He stood. "I've got to go. I'm tired. I feel like I'm losing everything."

You squandered it, she thought. "Harry . . ."

"I'm going to move out for awhile. I'll be gone by the time you get home."

Connie tried to say something, but he was gone. She could not say she wanted to see him there that evening or any other evening. She felt ill; she replayed the scene in her mind, shuddering herself as she thought of Harry sitting impassively in the chair like a stunned animal. The dealers were already back at their terminals; their curiosity evaporated when Harry left, or perhaps the gossip was put on hold until after hours.

Ten minutes later she went to her own terminal, read in the current market, hooked into Fox and the newsline. There were only forty minutes left in the trading session; the dollar was up against the major Eurocurrencies and off twenty against the yen. Activity was quiet: ninety-two traders in the pit circuit and everyone waiting for the 1500 CST release of the latest U.S. Gross National Product report. Connie evened up several accounts and went long dollars for her own account in anticipation that the report would be positive, contrary to expectations. The GNP was up and she made $30,000 before the close of trading.

After work she went to one of the best restaurants in town, ate alone, had three drinks. She had no desire to get home early. The threatened storm was a reality when she left the restaurant; the lower level of the streetcar was crowded and it was after eleven when she reached home. She got soaked in the half-block from the stop to her door. Harry was not there. She undressed, towelled her hair and got into a robe. His closet was empty, the drawers of his dresser pulled open and bare, only his spare razor in the bathroom. By this time the wind had picked up and the rain rattled the windowpanes. She ran through the house, turning on lights, closing windows, shutting off the lights again.

The playroom was last. Harry must have been able to get a van on short notice; his computer was gone. The rest of his junk was still there. Maybe he still hoped to come back. The window beside

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his worktable was open two inches and the rain was blowing in. The light above the bench was dim. She ought to just leave it open, let Harry worry about his own machines, if he worried. She realized suddenly that despite all his concern for them, despite all the time he had for them, he might not care about the machines at all. Well, she couldn't leave them at that.

Connie struggled to close the window all the way but someone had jammed it downward crookedly so that it was caught at an angle in the frame and was fighting against itself. It could not be forced closed. She grabbed the handles at the bottom of the frame, bent her knees and pulled. Nothing. She jerked it to break it lose, and though she could feel the strain in her wrists and shoulders, it would not budge. When she let off, the muscles of her arms quivered with weakness. Already her slippers and the bottom of her robe were wet. The tree limbs outside the window raged back and forth in the wind; the rain was a constant drumming on the roof.

She found a large crescent wrench. Using a short length of pipe as a fulcrum, she levered the wrench under the lower side of the window and leaned all her weight on it. The rain made her hands slick, and her tight grip flushed the blood out of them. She put her shoulders into it and shoved the wrench downward. The window shot up an inch, the wrench slipped, the pipe fell off the sill and hit her foot, and she slipped and fell. A gash in the palm of her hand bled profusely. She got up and pulled the window open, jiggling it when it stuck. The storm was at its height, and the wind and water flew into her face as she crouched to draw the window down again. She gritted her teeth; it was almost a smile. The counterweights squeaked and thumped in the wall until the window was completely closed.

The rustle of the tree diminished, the drumming of rain on the roof increased. She sat on the floor in her wet robe and sucked the blood from her cut. It was not as bad as she thought. ●

NEXT ISSUE

The November *IAsfm* will feature "The Gospel According to Gamaliel Crucis," a novella by the recent Nebula award winner Michael Bishop. We'll also have a story, "Shrinker," by Pamela Sargent while Charles Platt's Viewpoint, "In Defense of the Real World," will fire off the opening volley in our upcoming, two-part debate on the merits of fantasy. Don't miss this controversial piece or our other fine stories. Pick up your copy. On sale September 27, 1983.

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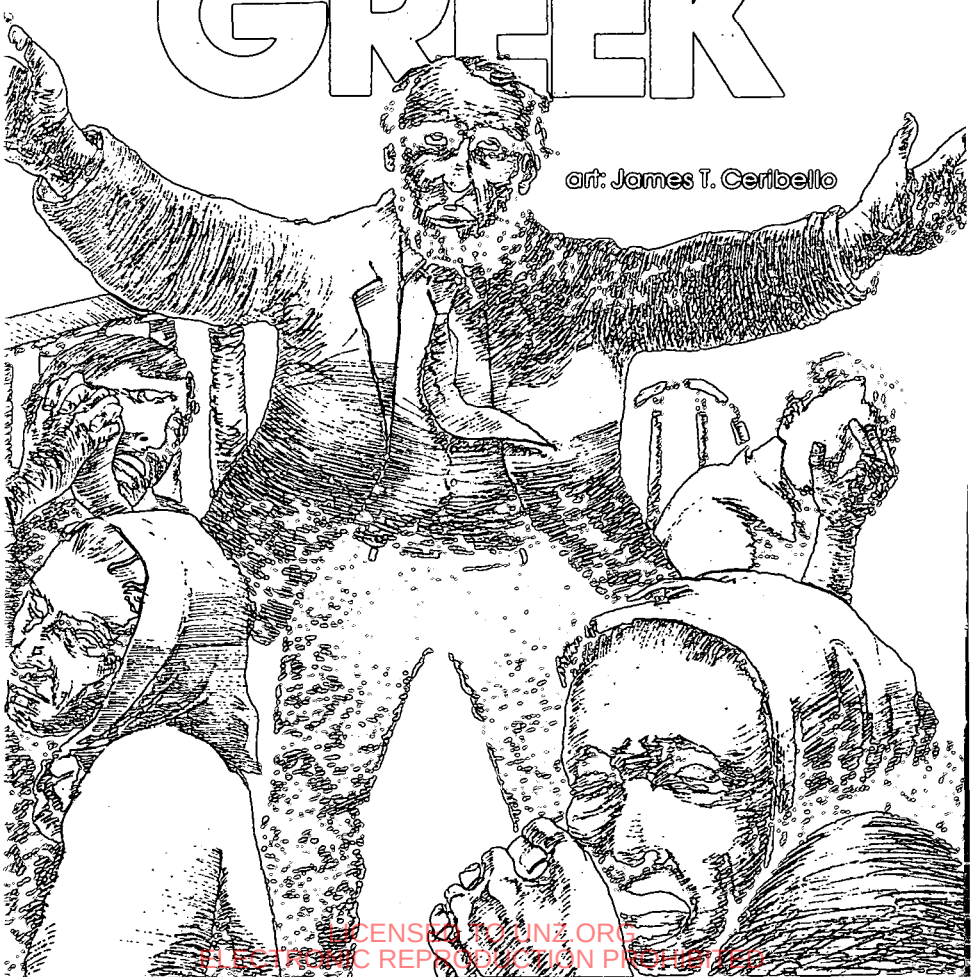
Formerly of Denver, Leigh Kennedy
has adopted Austin,
Texas as her home.
She works full-time as a
typist at Austin Community College
and pursues writing,
reading, photography, and other
interests in her spare moments.
"Greek" is dedicated
to her employers at ACC
for their tolerance of stolen moments.

by Leigh Kennedy

GREEK

art: James T. Ceribello



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Most of the voices she heard murmured devotion.

Weeping and praying, a hundred voices chorused the one speaking a string of unhesitating syllables, flowing, without emphasis or inflection, a monotone chant.

Then, a change.

The background voices hushed to a whisper, listening to the voice of Apocalypse. The words were strange and difficult, but the voice was lyrical. Not praying, but revealing.

There were meanings behind the words—pauses, rising and falling of voice, but the story was buried by the hallelujahs of the Pentecostal Church.

Hannah turned the cassette player off. She dug through the papers and envelopes that cluttered her desk. "Uhm," she said, placing the tips of her fingers on her brow. "I took the tape and your term paper to Dr. Van Pelt in the linguistics department. He told me it was Greek, but he hasn't translated it yet." Apologetically, she looked at her student, who sat silently in the chair across from her. "I hated to tell him to hurry on it, you know?"

"Greek?" Candy said.

Hannah nodded. "Van Pelt says that this man probably knows the language fluently from the way it flows. Do you know anything about him?"

Candy considered. "Well, the preacher and everyone seemed pretty quiet whenever he started up. He sounded more like he was *saying* something than the others. When the preacher interpreted it, though, it was the same kind of thing he said for the other speakers. You know—God is watching and caring for us. Stuff like that."

"What did the man do?"

Candy frowned. "Nothing. I mean, he just seemed like an old greaseball, anyway, you know?"

Hannah nodded. "Let me show you something." She went to her file cabinet and picked over the folders. She pulled out a newspaper clipping and handed it to Candy.

Candy read the clipping, which was an account from another city about an old black woman who seemed to have acquired the ability to speak Chinese, read ideograms, and had traded her few possessions for artwork, fabrics, Woolworth vases, that had a Chinese flavor. She had for years been living alone in the old family farm, living only off her garden, chopping her own firewood.

"That's weird," Candy said.

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Hannah watched her face for a moment, hoping to see a spark of curiosity or connection indicating academic initiative. Candy looked at Hannah expectantly.

"Have you ever heard of xenoglossia?" Hannah asked, knowing well that one of the books she had supposedly read for her term paper had mentioned it, although briefly. In fact, the subject of glossolalia had to include the debate over whether the languages used were real or not. But then, Candy's term paper hadn't been much more than a definition of glossolalia and an explanation of her visit with a friend to the church.

"Xenoglossia," Candy repeated. "I think I saw it somewhere, but I don't remember . . ."

Hannah waited for Candy to do a little brain-wracking. She suppressed her whole stock of impatient feelings about students who no longer seemed to stretch their minds. They wanted everything told to them simply, then perhaps they would retain it. "What," Hannah said emphatically, "is an old man doing speaking ancient Greek in a Pentecostal Church? Where does an old woman alone on a farm acquire the Chinese language?"

Candy looked startled. "I don't know. Hmmm."

Hannah smiled. "It almost seems as though they could be the same kind of case, doesn't it?" In her teacher's voice, Hannah said, "I want you to think hard about how this could happen, perhaps in terms of environmental influences, unconscious influences, subliminal learning. Try to find out more about this man on your tape. Maybe he had Greek relatives . . . The old woman may have lived next door to a Chinese family when she was young and learned, then forgot, the language. The man may have a similar experience."

Candy sat with attentive but unconvinced eyes. Hannah felt that she may as well tell her student that crossword puzzles were the key to knowledge.

"Well, okay," Hannah said. "I thought you should know about the man speaking Greek, in case you decide someday to borrow the work you've done on this paper for another term paper in the future."

"Thank you, Dr. Karel." Candy gathered her books in her arms, somehow not catching the long silk of her hair in them.

Hannah followed her to the door of her office, like a hostess, while Candy exited. "See you in class."

She read through another term paper, sitting on the bed, an

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afghan thrown over her shoulders, a cup of coffee on the nightstand. She sighed.

"What's the matter?" Ted asked.

"Nothing, really."

"You seem a little depressed or something."

She put her pen down and stared at the paper. "I'm too idealistic."

"Ah, burn-out," he said sympathetically. "And you're so young."

She laughed. "No, if I were burned out, I wouldn't feel this sad. I just feel that they don't seem to have much *umph*. I was so full of fire when I was an undergraduate. They don't even seem curious. They have no ideals, no heroes, no great aspirations—other than to make money . . . or have a good time."

"You're still full of fire," he said, putting his hand on her knee.

"I thought that the student who wrote the paper on speaking in tongues would be fascinated with the Greek, but it meant nothing to her. I suspected that any time she would ask me if I was going to give her a lower grade because she didn't match the others."

"It's probably always been like that, you just don't remember."

She looked at him, wanting to believe that it was true. He seemed to be able to stack up facts into orderly rows and give a convincing argument to any issue. But sometimes she mistrusted that, searching for the bridges that no one else had yet seen. Could it really be that students were deteriorating?

She shrugged. "Maybe," she said.

She paced in front of her classroom. "I just read an interesting article in the new *Journal of Sociology*. I want you to think about this for awhile. There seems to be a decline of old, derelict poor living in the downtown areas of five major American cities. The facts were gathered in a similar way ten years ago and last year by the same researcher. He has presented his data thus." She drew a grid on the blackboard and filled in numbers, dates, and cities.

She looked at her students. Some seemed alert, some not. "I know that to do a proper assessment, you should read the article itself, and read other articles on the same subject. But, pretend you know a lot about it, and pretend that these facts are reliable—which they may be. Consider: is it possible that these are statistical facts and not real facts? If it is a reality, how has this come about?"

Silence. No eye contact.

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Prodding them, she asked, "What happened when these people were young?"

They said nothing.

"What about those who lived through the Great Depression?"

"Maybe they're dying off," one of her more aggressive students said.

"Yes, maybe so." She calculated. "They would have been in their prime during the Depression. Do you think that would have been a significant factor in this population?"

No one disputed the idea. Most wrote it down in their notebooks.

Another student raised her hand. "What about social programs?"

"What do you think?" Hannah asked her class. "Do you mean social programs for those on the streets or for people before they get to this stage?"

"Maybe before," the girl murmured, not sure.

By the end of class time, they had discussed governmental budget cuts in social programs, the plight of the old and economically useless in an aggressively money-making society, changes in the family's role and self-expectations. Hannah had dragged every last observation out of them. She heard cynicism. They blandly discussed everything going down the drain, but not in the way that Hannah felt.

"Listen," she finally said. "It's nearly impossible to do something that you think will be effective to make social changes. But if we all give up first, then what? We just have to chip away at it. It will *look* hopeless even if you work your whole life at it, but it *is* hopeless if no one cares. So, you," she tried not to, but did point at an especially flip student, "have to care or nothing of value will ever be done."

She let them go, and as they left, they all seemed to shrug past her.

Candy stopped by after class the same day that Dr. Van Pelt brought the translation by.

"I haven't had a chance to talk to that old man, you know," she said.

"Have you thought about it? What do you think?"

"I don't know," Candy said, wide-eyed. "I think he's a loon."

"That's not an answer," Hannah said. "Dr. Van Pelt said that he is reciting almost verbatim the *Iliad*." Hannah watched her student. "By Homer," she added.

"Boy, that's weird," Candy said.

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"What church is it?" Hannah got out a pen and found a clear space on a file folder to write down the address. Candy paused, as if she realized that she was handing something over that was important, but couldn't manage the strength of carrying it. She gave the address and added a few landmarks. "I may drop by and talk to him myself," Hannah said.

"You can't just go barge in on him," Ted said to her over dinner.

"I'm not going to barge in on him, I'm just going to find him after church and talk to him."

"How are you going to find him?"

"I'll know. He sounds different from the rest of them."

"What do you think you're going to find out anyway?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. My Finnish grandmother used to tell me I was going to get in trouble all my life because I couldn't keep my nose out of other people's business. That's why I became a sociologist." She looked at him seriously. "Aren't you curious, too?"

He broke another roll from the basket. "I don't think it's going to be as exciting as *you* think. Besides, I agree with the Finns."

The church was not full of people but it brimmed with spirit. Hannah arrived late and hesitantly broke through that fullness into an empty space on a folding chair. The fluorescent light from ceiling panels shone harshly in the square room.

She was out of place, even though she had tucked her curly brown hair into a bun and wore the most conservative of her clothes. Her posture, expressions, and gestures marked her just as obviously as if she'd tied a gypsy scarf around her waist.

They sang and swayed, clapping in time. Some of the voices wailed, some were sweet, others profound. The preacher called out between clap-beats, "Love the Lord!" Bewildered babies cried. Hannah looked stiffly at the women's rounded shoulders and the men's shiny hair.

She put her hand in her canvas bag, feeling like a spy because of the small tape recorder hidden within. She fumbled with a hymnal, suspecting that she could hide her confusion by finding their song. All the while, she felt like a child again. The more enthusiastic they became, the more embarrassed Hannah was. Like being caught with a book that was trashy, or in clothes that were out-of-style but not defiantly so.

Maybe he's not even here, she thought. And it occured to her

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that this could be a lot of discomfort for little reason. Ted was probably right. . . .

She didn't belong and every now and then a glance from someone reminded her. These fifty or sixty people probably knew each other well. She imagined them all turning at once to look at her, and in one big voice asking, "What are *you* doing here?" Or, running after her as an angry mob once they realized she was an intruder. Silly, she thought, these people are just worshipping God in their way. But she started to gather her things to go.

Then a sudden quiet bade her be still.

The preacher began to talk. His voice was pleading as he told of a man whose daughter had fallen dead only days after he'd denied God. Women wept as the preacher moved to and fro, retelling the anguish of the father. Men bowed their heads and worked their jaws.

Hannah was transfixed. She forgot herself and wondered at the effectiveness of his oration. Like a tidal force, he pulled his congregation back and forth with upturned palms full of accusing words. He pushed his prayer upon them, and drew prayers out as they began to murmur. Hannah could smell the heat rising out beyond their perfumed deodorants and after-shave. They were massive and weeping.

Someone moaned with a wide-open mouth, stood, stumbled forward, and then collapsed.

Hannah rose in her seat but kept herself from going forward. The man on the floor trembled and thrashed his head back and forth as he poured out single and double syllables. The preacher counterpointed. Someone begged for mercy. Someone else begged Jesus to come into her heart and her life. Others came staggering forward, pleading in sounds that she couldn't understand at all. Hannah felt oppressed by the God that they brought down through the roof and up through the dusty linoleum.

"*N, ra kai egkos afeken, ekon d' emartanay fotos,*" he said.

Hannah jammed her fingers down on "play" and "record."

" . . . *pama shatama matama katoo shatami* . . ." another said.

No, no where did he go? She stretched to see.

And then she saw him—wizened, looking like a reformed alcoholic in his lean raggedness. He gestured, telling his story.

Following him home, she was not subtle as she rolled and parked, every block—but then her subject was unsuspecting.

She watched him enter an old apartment building. Inside the dirty tiled foyer, she pondered before sixteen mailboxes. Elimi-

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nating the couples, the females, she was left with nine featureless names.

Of course, the first choice was wrong. She was still dazed from the intensity of the church and expected the young man at the door to conjure or chant at her. He leered instead.

"Uh, I'm looking for a friend of mine. From church. An older man."

"Oh," the young man said sourly, "you must mean number eight."

"Thank—" she said to the closing door.

She hurried down the hall. Through the lacquered door she heard his voice singing. Before she knocked, she flipped her tape cassette and turned the recorder on, then put it back in her purse.

The subject opened the door to her knock and Hannah was overcome at the realization of the man standing in his home.

"Hi," she said. "My name is Hannah Karel."

"Hullo?" His eyes were curious and thorough.

"I just came from the church. May I come in and talk to you?" She sounded unconvincing even to herself. "I want to talk about . . . speaking in tongues."

"Yes. Lord love you, come in."

It didn't fit. Hannah was disconcerted by his manner—a gentle-voiced alkie. But it wasn't fair to judge by his appearance. The room didn't fit either. Sketches and paintings of soldiers with spears and arrows, landscapes of rocky shores hung on the walls, most pinned with tacks. Ketchup, salt, and pepper had to share the small table with pencils, acrylics, and rags. A straight-backed chair stood by the window, which without a curtain allowed flat light to brighten the room. The furniture was broken and mean, but the strange art gave it a garret feel.

"Did you do all these?" she asked, seeing another portrait behind her. Though his hand was naive, Hannah saw power.

"Yeah. I just took up painting a few years ago. Would you like some orange soda?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Did you see my exhibition at the church last month?"

"Oh, no, I missed that," Hannah said uncomfortably.

He had gone into another room, which Hannah suspected was a small kitchen. Water rushed; she heard metal clinking glass, a gurgle of liquid.

"How long have you been painting?" she said.

He came back into the room and gave her a glass, and sat down in the chair by the window. Hannah wished she had brought her

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camera—she could see the black and white portrait with harsh light on half his face, all pits, furrows, and oil, defined at the border of sun, then the night side of grays. She liked the sound of his voice, his big clumsy-looking hands.

"I was a drinker, you see," he said. "I thought of nothin' but the bottle and how to get more when I was out. How to get more when I had enough. And one night, God came to me. He told me—this is true and I'm not afraid to say it—He told me that He was going to give me spirit because I was empty. And I began to speak . . ." He closed his eyes.

"Speak in Greek."

"Greek?" he said.

Hannah watched him.

". . . the words that God gave me to worship Him. And he gave me dreams to go with the sounds."

"But where did you learn Greek?" she asked.

"I don't know Greek. I don't know what you're talking about." He seemed puzzled. He sipped at his soda. "I love God and I love my dreams. That's why I began to paint. It was about five years ago now. I had to . . . to *do* something. Something to show how I see."

Hannah looked around at the paintings and sketches. She looked at the portrait of the woman, whose ringlets were dark on her forehead. The stark landscapes, the costumes he dressed his subjects in . . .

"What does '*aspairontos*' mean?" Hannah asked.

"What?" He leaned forward and wrinkled his nose.

" '*Aspairontos.*' "

Again, he leaned forward, but this time his hands fell between his spread knees as if he'd just dropped something unimportant. "The words don't mean nothin', miss, between you and me, except they are the words that come to me. I see things when I say them. But they're just words."

Hannah nodded. She didn't doubt his belief. "Did you know you're speaking ancient Greek?"

He stared at her. "You're not really from the church at all, are you? I thought you'd come to talk about the Lord and pray with me."

"I'm a sociology professor. I was curious about where you learned Greek and why you recite it in the church as if you were speaking in tongues."

He looked away from her into the flat light out the window and

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was still. "No one else would listen and I have to say the words to see the story. Everyone else thought I was just crazy."

"The story?"

"The story in my mind."

But he would say no more about it.

Hannah sat in the kitchen with Dr. Van Pelt, his wife and their year-and-a-half old, who clung to his mother's fingers as he sat on her knee.

"Well, it's definitely Homer, too," Van Pelt said, moving one piece of paper over another and back again. Sometimes he lifted a paper and peeked under it as if it were a young woman's skirt. "But not all of it. This isn't in place, at least, and I don't remember it in the work." He read: " 'The mind of man is dying, even their dreams have no substance.' "

Hannah sighed. "Trouble is, I really believe that he doesn't know what he's saying. Maybe his Jungian archetypes are coming forward."

"Come on, Dr. Karel," Van Pelt said. He gave her the look probably reserved for students who beg off exams. "You don't believe that, do you? Even with the human linguistic apparatus being an inherent part of our neurological structure, one must learn the ingredients—the vocabulary—at the very least."

Hannah shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe it *is* God."

Van Pelt and his wife exchanged glances. The baby said something like "lay-chay" and reached for his bottle. "I doubt that," Van Pelt said.

"I was kidding," Hannah said defensively. "But imagine if Homer was a prophet and what's the difference between the *Iliad* and the Bible . . ."

"It's obvious you lack theological background, Dr. Karel," he said.

He was not a man that could see another side even for the sake of argument. Hannah had gotten so used to egging her students on to brainstorm a question that she'd forgotten the wall that learning could build around some academic individuals. "Well, what about random duplication of sound?" she asked. "Just coincidentally, your interpretation of his sound matches closely . . ."

She stopped speaking as Van Pelt shook his head. He pointed to the pages of syllables garnished with dots, double dots, upside-down e's, and vowels jammed together.

"I have trained for years," he said, then stopped, looking at her indulgently. He shook his head. "He's just lying."

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Hannah stared at the papers.

Why did she believe the old man more than Van Pelt and his years of education and research? Obviously, the professor was right.

Obviously.

"Thank you so much for your time, Dr. Van Pelt. I really do appreciate it. I'm sure it's probably a case of cryptomnesia. As soon as I find out his learning source, I'll let you know."

Van Pelt smiled. His wife smiled, too. The baby babbled something. "I would be interested, for sure," Van Pelt said. "Keep in touch about it."

Candy didn't come into her office. She stood in the doorway, her eyes restlessly glancing back into either direction of the hallways.

"I went to his hometown," Hannah said, rising to meet her student, since the student wouldn't come to her. "I traced his entire life history, talked to his psychologist at the veteran's hospital. I met his sister. I even went back and talked to the minister at that church, which was a difficult interview to say the least. Nothing. No Greek neighbors, no leads that anyone knows of. He never did it before a few years ago. Nothing."

Candy nodded.

"What do you think?" Hannah asked her.

"Gee, I don't know."

Candy looked exhausted somehow. She was probably trying to do too much. Remembering her undergraduate days of classes, boyfriends, and part-time work, Hannah felt a sudden sympathy. "Come on in, Candy," Hannah said. "Let's try to think of another approach."

Candy hesitated. "Well, I really gotta go, Dr. Karel. I have to study."

Hannah let her hands fall. "Are you all right? You look tired."

Candy was mute for a moment, then looked at Hannah with sad, sad eyes. "I've been having these really weird dreams lately." Her chin fluttered. "They're so *real*. They're like a movie." She waited a long moment then burst into tears. "My mother thinks I'm crazy!"

Hannah shut her office door and listened to Candy's dream of living on a steep mountains, spinning raw wool that coated her hands with lanolin, and waiting for the peacock-colorful warriors to come home. Her mother told her she must be asleep; Candy felt she was awake.

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But her mother would only put her hands over her ears and weep in alarm when Candy chanted all that gibberish.

She had always been comfortable on these streets where people lived out of garbage cans, used the sidewalks for their beds and urinals, lay their heads on bundles of newspapers at night.

She had been the kind of child that felt "missions." Her mother caught her carrying canned goods and blankets out into the suburban streets at night, believing that the poor children that Dickens had revealed to her were huddling in doorways, waiting for the good-hearted soul. She continued that into college, when she could be found serving up turkey and dressing to the homeless before going home to her own family. Even still, she sometimes resented the researching, the preparation for classes, all the peripheral things to the purpose of her life.

Even the old men who leered without shame, she pardoned—not excused—and remained tolerant of the greasy old women, carrying their load of tattered shopping bags from the best uptown department stores. Even through the years of studying social problems, structures, and conditions that lead to the rise, fall, or stasis in the lives around her, she had never let people elude her.

She came off a corner in a dawn chill, and saw an old woman across the street wearing several layers of clothing. The woman stood near the corrugated trash barrel, separating strips of greasy paper bags and torn cloth into piles.

The old woman muttered.

No. Not muttered. Sang. In a raspy old voice without any rhythm, she sang a phrase, paused with effort in her work, then sang again.

Hannah stood beside her and listened.

She knew the words, knew the tale that the old woman sang. As sure as any memory of her childhood, she remembered her Finnish grandmother reading the *Kalevala*.

"Siina kukkuos, kakonen, hekyttele, hietarinta, hiloa hoperinta, tinarinta, riukuttele!"

Hannah remembered the people of her grandmother's tales—Ukko swinging his hammer, wearing a skirt of fire and blue stockings. Aarni, guarding hidden treasures. Good deeds and bad done by colorful people who lived in a ripe land . . .

Mastered by desire impulsive
By a night's inward urging.
I am ready now for singing.
Ready to begin the chanting

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Of our nation's ancient folk-song
Handed down from by-gone ages . . .

She looked around. The sun was a blazing red on the edge of a cobalt sky. Birds sang on blossoming trees. Down the street, a man played a flute. Others listened, their faces alive, alert, curious.

Hannah saw a grimy old man peer longingly from a dingy doorway. She turned back to the old woman poking through the trash. "Do you speak Finnish?" she asked in Finnish.

"Wha'?" the old woman said.

Hannah waited impatiently for her call to go through a maze of switchboards and secretaries in a university across the continent before she heard the good-natured voice.

"Dr. Taylor, my name is Hannah Karel. I wrote you a letter, but I decided that I really couldn't wait to talk to you. Look, I've been downtown. Your article in the journal is wrong. There are just as many derelicts, aren't there?"

The voice laughed. "Maybe in your downtown, but since I don't know where you are . . ."

"No, what I mean is—your article was deliberately wrong, wasn't it? To make us look?"

"So you've seen?"

"Yes." Hannah moved things on her desk with shaking hands. "What do we do?"

"Enjoy it, I guess."

Van Pelt shook his head. "Someone once found a fountain pen embedded in sedimentary rock side-by-side with fossils from the Pre-Cambrian. There could be speculation that Martians dropped it during a tour in one million B.C. But there was an explanation."

Hannah listened to his weary voice. He looked tired and empty to her. "Yes," she said gently. "But that doesn't mean nothing happened. An explanation doesn't wipe out the event. And to perceive the event, sometimes you need imagination."

"I don't understand what you're getting at."

"I'm sorry you don't," she said. As she looked at him, she had a feeling that, where in his brain he'd swept out magic and curiosity, now seeped ever so slowly, something old but bright. ●

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(from page 25)

SECOND SOLUTION TO TETHERED PURPLE-PEBBLE EATERS

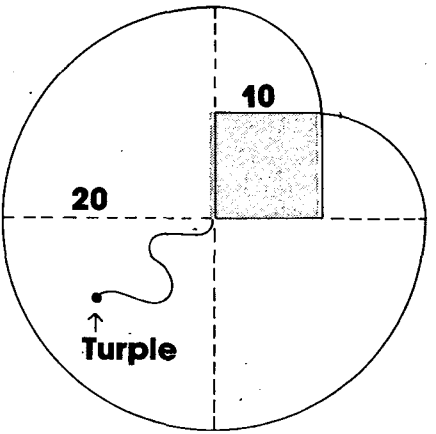

Figure 2

As Figure 2 makes clear, the grazing area consists of three quadrants of a circle with radius 20, and two quadrants of a circle with radius 10. Each large quadrant has an area of 314.159+, so the three together make 942.47+ square feet. The small quadrant, of radius 10, has an area of 78.539+, so the two make about 157.08 square feet. Adding the areas of all five quadrants gives a total grazing area close to 1,099.55 feet.

Watch for a curve on our next problem. Suppose that each of the turple's excreted cubes has a volume exactly equal to its surface area. How long is the cube's side? See page 99 for solution.

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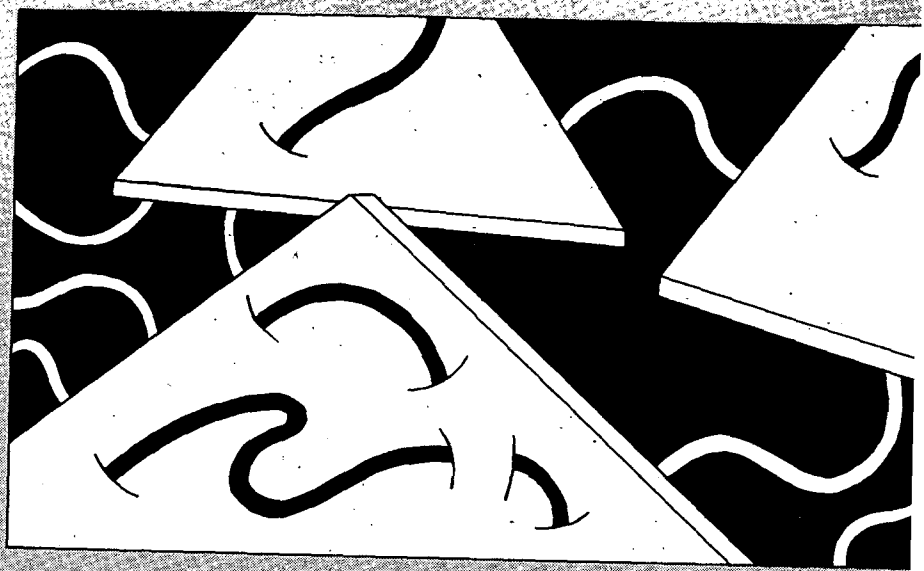
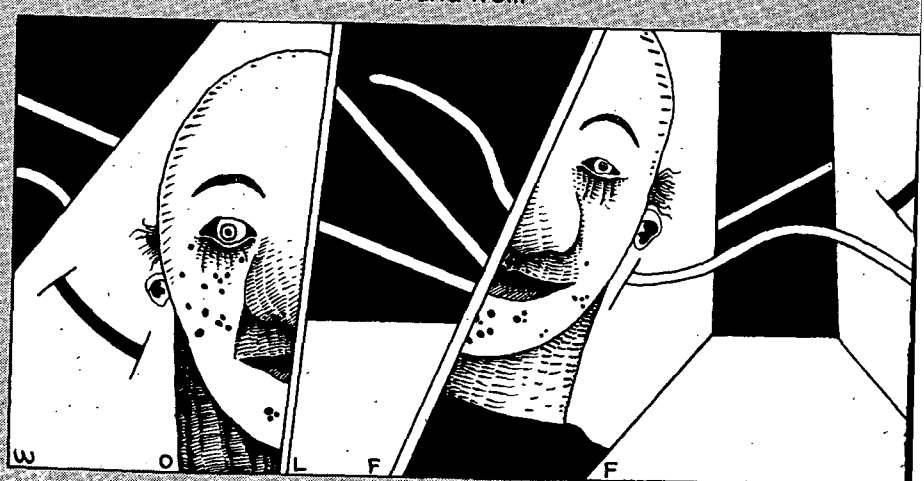


INVADERS

by Andrew Weiner

art: Roland Wolff



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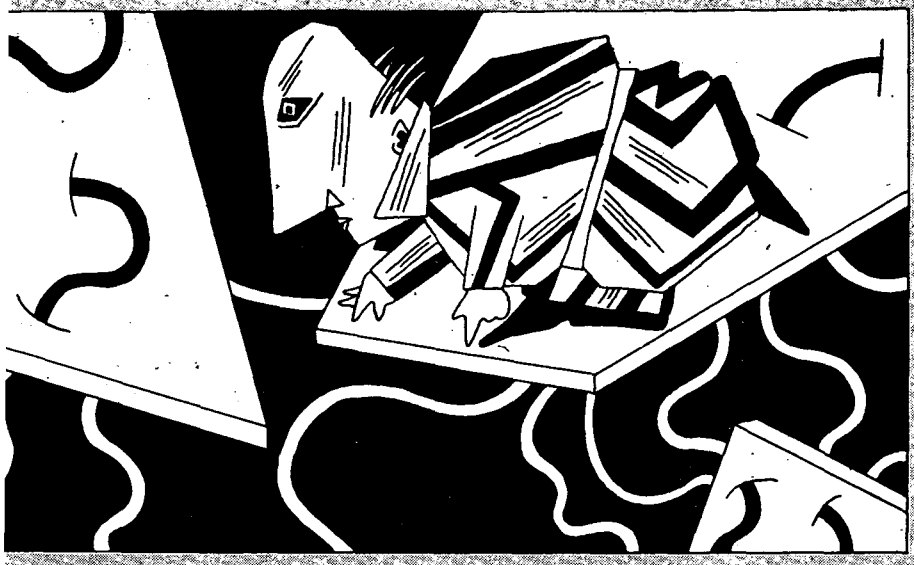
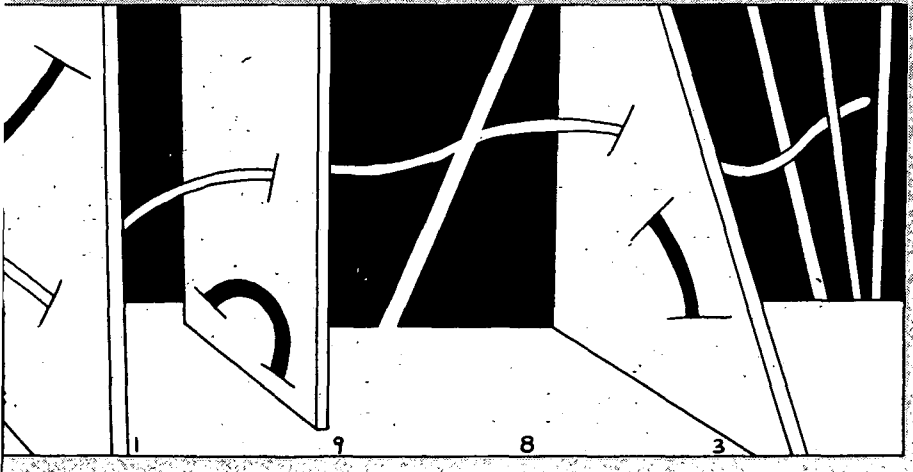


The author was born in London, England, but has been living in Canada for some eight years now. His stories have appeared in *F&SF*, *Twilight Zone*, and *Chrysalis 10*. He'd like to thank H. L. Gold for his help on this story, particularly for his suggestion on the location of the invaders' entryway.



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An invader materialized in mid-air, just above Henderson's left ear. He was small, even as invaders go, no more than two feet high. He was dressed in a rather dazzling purple snowsuit.

"This copy has no *snap*," Henderson, my supervisor, was saying. "No *bite*."

I found it difficult to concentrate on his diagnosis. My eyes tracked the invader as he somersaulted in the air and peered into Henderson's nostrils. Henderson did not so much as flinch. Obviously he did not see the invader. Or if he did, he was not prepared to give any sign of it.

"Are you listening to me, Doug?"

The invader ceased his inspection of Henderson's nose, and perched on his desk, apparently to examine my copy.

"*I've just walked a thousand miles in my new Truflex shoes*," Henderson read. "*And it feels like I'm walking on air.*"

He jabbed his finger disgustedly at the rough lay-out prepared by the art department to illustrate my copy. It showed an airline stewardess posed in the aisle of an airplane.

Actually, I had thought this one of my better concepts. But I could see now that it did not meet the high standards of my employers, Pearson Publicity, leaders in advertising in the city of Toronto for more than eleven years.

"Really, Doug," Henderson said. "What are you thinking of?"

I could see, also, that my future with the company in my current capacity as senior writer, or indeed in any capacity whatsoever, looked progressively dimmer. Ever since the invaders had come, things had been going from bad to worse. But I could hardly confide the reason for my dismal performance to Henderson.

"I guess," I said, "that it won't fly, right?"

"I don't think it's funny," Henderson said. "Not funny at all."

Oh, it was unfair, completely unfair, that I and apparently I alone could see these invaders. Certainly I had not asked for this unique ability. I would much rather have proceeded, like the rest of the human race, in a state of blissful ignorance of the fact that we had indeed been invaded.

"I'll take another shot at it," I said.

I sneaked another glance at the invader, who was still perched on the desk. The invader winked at me. Was I supposed to know him? There were hundreds, if not thousands, of these invaders. I could hardly be expected to remember them all.

The invader, to my relief, drifted across to the window to stare out at the streets below. His little bald head glinted in the afternoon sun. Observing, as always. Simply observing.

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I gathered up the lay-out and moved with all possible speed towards the door.

"Hold on a moment, Doug," Henderson said.

I turned and waited while Henderson picked up his pipe out of the ashtray and sucked at it ponderously.

"Something on your mind?" he asked. "I'd be glad to lend an ear."

"That's very kind," I said. "But there's nothing on my mind. Nothing I can't handle, at any rate."

Even if I was prepared to talk about my problem, the idea of confiding in an imbecile like Henderson was completely repulsive.

"Well, just keep it in mind," he said, puffing on his pipe in what he must have imagined to be a fatherly manner. Actually he was hardly five years older than me.

"I will," I said. "I certainly will."

Finally making my escape, closing the door firmly behind me, I heaved a sigh of relief. Once again I had managed to pull it off. Once again I had remained in the presence of an invader without betraying the fact that I could see him. But how many more times could I do that before beginning to crack?

Why wouldn't they just go away?

Seeing them was bad enough. Knowing where they came from, knowing that *I* was in some obscure way responsible for their invasion, was perhaps even worse.

The day the invaders came had been a more than usually trying one for me at work. The advertising manager for Rumple Puddings had torpedoed our entire Christmas campaign, scrapping an entire series of advertisements that he had approved not two weeks before. Instead he had asked us to design a new campaign around a recent dream of the wife, or perhaps it was the mother-in-law, of the general manager of the Pudding Division. In this dream, it seemed, a host of angels descended from the skies bearing steaming puddings. . . .

The first thing I did when I arrived home that night, then, was to pour myself a shot of brandy. But I should point out that the drink had hardly touched my lips when I saw the invader. Indeed, I nearly choked on it.

The invader came through the bathroom door, into the living room of my apartment. The door was closed, and still he came through it, first his head, then his arms and torso, finally his legs. He did so in slow motion, as though swimming. He was of diminutive stature, perhaps three feet tall, and quite bald, but

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otherwise human in appearance. He might have been a midget, but for his ability to swim through bathroom doors and hover, apparently effortlessly, in mid-air.

I blinked, but the invader was still there. I closed my eyes and counted, slowly, to ten. And again he was still there, surveying the room with intense interest. He peered at the furniture, the picture on the wall, the magazines on the coffee table. He stared out the window at the view of the city spread out twenty floors below. Finally he turned his attention to me.

"Charming," he said, in clear unaccented English. "What a charming place."

I realized that my jaw was hanging open. I closed it, and tried to think of something appropriate to say. Nothing came to mind.

"Sorry to drop in so unexpectedly," he said, "but this is what you might call a spur-of-the-moment trip."

"Where . . ." I stuttered, "where did you come from?"

"The bathroom," the invader said. He nodded towards the bathroom door. As if on cue, a second bald head poked its way through, followed by the balance of a second invader.

"Allow me to introduce my good friend—" He paused. "You can call him Harvey. And you can call me Norman."

"Delighted," Harvey said.

Norman drifted into the kitchen and poked his head through the door of the refrigerator. The pickings, as usual, were rather lean, but he returned with a half-empty package of processed cheese slices. He pulled out a slice and began to chew on it thoughtfully, neglecting to remove the cellophane wrapping.

"Interesting," he said.

"Do make yourself at home," I said sarcastically, although the nuance was probably lost. I got up and crossed to the bathroom and opened the door. The head of still another invader bumped against my chest.

"Ouch," he said. "Watch it, buddy."

Ignoring his complaint I stared, fascinated, at the hole in my bathroom ceiling. Not a hole, exactly. More like a patch of shimmering blackness, through which were now descending the feet of yet another invader.

"What is *that?*" I wondered aloud.

Norman—I recognized him now by his luridly green snowsuit—materialized on top of the sink.

"It's the gateway," he said, "to where we live. What your scientists might call a warp."

"I don't understand," I said. "Where do you live? Upstairs?"

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"Hardly."

"Another planet?" I asked. "Another dimension?"

"Something like that," Norman said, airily.

I considered, momentarily, calling up the superintendent to plug the hole. On further consideration I decided to have another drink.

Soon there were more than twenty invaders sitting around my living room, all between two and three feet tall, all bald, all dressed in brightly colored snowsuits, all nearly indistinguishable from one another. There was no way of telling whether they were male, female, or something else again, and I never did find out. They seemed very much at ease, munching on cheese slices and wilted celery from my refrigerator, and passing round my Portuguese brandy.

"Disgusting," one said, in reference to the brandy.

"It's the best I could afford," I said defensively, "on my salary."

"Afford?" the invader echoed. "Salary?"

"Low-grade socioeconomic structure," Norman explained. "Individual consumption linked to individual production by highly inefficient token exchange system."

"Exchange," said the first invader, as though scandalized. "Disgusting."

"Now then," Norman said. "We're not here to pass judgements."

"Why are you here?" I asked.

"Oh, we're just hanging out," Norman said. "Hanging out and hanging loose, as they say in the vernacular."

"And how is it you speak English?" I asked. "Did you monitor our TV transmissions?"

"Something like that."

The situation was becoming clear. Either I was going crazy or else my apartment was being occupied by a swarm of midget aliens from another dimension. The first explanation seemed by far the more likely, which was why I had as yet made no move to call the police or, for that matter, the fire brigade. Who *did* one call in a situation like this?

"I'm going nuts," I said.

"Not at all," Norman said. "Considering your socio-cultural context, you are really quite well balanced."

"I'm getting out of here," I said, picking up my jacket and striding towards the door. I glanced nervously over my shoulder, but they made no move to stop me.

"Perhaps," Norman said, catching my eye, "you could pick up

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some more native foodstuffs on the way home. Including some more of these most interesting cheese slices."

If I stayed away long enough, I thought, they might just vanish. Like a bad dream.

I went into a nearby bar and took a stool in front of the bartender. It was one of those pseudo-British pubs, the sort of place I usually deplore, but for the moment it seemed a haven of sanity.

I was on my third drink when the invader—I believe it was Harvey—appeared from nowhere to hover several feet above the surface of the bar. He observed the occupants of the room with a keen interest. No one paid him the slightest bit of attention.

Did no one see him? Or did everyone see him but prefer, like me, to hold their peace for fear of being certified insane? Surely there would have been *some* sign of amazement and dismay? Reluctantly, I sought consensual validation. As I had somehow expected, it was not to be had.

I nudged the person on the stool next to me at the bar, a morose middle-aged man in the rumpled polyester uniform of middle management.

"Excuse me," I said. "Did you see, that is, do you see . . ."

"Yes?"

Clearly he did not see. "I was wondering if you had seen the Turner exhibit. At the museum. I was thinking of going . . ."

"Turner?"

"Well," I gibbered. "Good talking to you but I really must be going."

I left my drink half-finished and rushed for the door. The invader remained behind, apparently absorbed in watching a game of darts. But there was no escaping them. Out on the streets the invaders were everywhere. Peering into shop windows, perched on the roofs of parked cars, hovering over the sidewalk. Invaders everywhere, and no one seeing them but me. Invaders.

My living room, though, was mercifully empty when I returned home. Cautiously I opened the bathroom door. An invader was just dropping down from the ceiling.

"Would you mind?" I asked, as he hovered there staring at me.

"Mind?"

"I want to use the bathroom."

"Go right ahead," the invader said.

It was then that Norman chose to appear. "These people," he told the newcomer, "place a high value on the privacy of certain bodily functions."

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"Can't I watch?" the other asked.

"Watch someone else," Norman said. "Remember that this one can see us."

Both then dematerialized, allowing me to complete my ablutions and retire to bed.

The invaders, however, were back in force the next morning. Thirty or so were scattered around, reading my magazines, playing my stereo, eating my food and nibbling experimentally on my house plants.

"Stop that," I told the nibblers. They stopped.

I found Norman reading a copy of *People* in the kitchen, perched on top of the shelves.

"Will Farrah reconcile with Lee?" he asked me.

"This is too much," I said. "Really too much. There's a whole city out there. Why pick on me?"

"We like it here," he said.

"This can't go on," I said. "You have to get these people out of here. I just can't stand it any longer. Besides, I have a friend coming over this evening and I don't want any distractions."

"I know," Norman said. "I read your calendar. Heavy date, huh?"

"Out," I said. "Get out of here before I call the police."

"Call away," Norman said. "We both know what will happen then. Nevertheless, I shall obey your wishes. We do want to keep things on an amicable basis."

Invaders had often featured in the dimly remembered comic books of my youth. Invaders bearing weapons of war, on a mission of intergalactic conquest, come to loot and pillage and devastate our fair planet. My own visitors had so far shown no inclinations along those lines. Nevertheless, I thought of them as invaders, because that it is exactly what they were: invasive, intrusive, in violation of all normal privacy and dignity. Where they might be invading from, and to what exact purpose, remained in the realms of speculation. But invaders they certainly were.

It was that very night that I realized that they recognized absolutely no limits upon their freedom of mobility. I had not necessarily expected Norman to observe our agreement—indeed I was surprised to find my apartment deserted on my return from work—but somehow I had not expected that they would have the unmitigated gall to penetrate my own bedroom at what might delicately be described as a critical juncture.

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"Is there something the matter?" Carol asked, noticing my sudden hesitation.

Although the invader—it was, I believe, a new arrival—appeared more interested in the fabric of my bedspread than in our activities beneath it, I found myself too disconcerted to continue.

"Nothing," I said. "That is, very little. A few problems at work."

"You were thinking about *work?*"

Oh, it was too much, it was really too much. After the invader had departed, and then Carol too, on a distinctly icy note, I examined my options. Escape seemed to be my best alternative. I called the airline and booked a morning flight to New York, then settled down to watch the TV news.

The president of the United States was speaking on the White House lawn. An invader popped out of nowhere to peer into his mouth as he spoke, apparently examining the presidential bridgework. A second invader studied the notes on the podium. And no one, not the president, nor any of the assembled crowd, took any notice whatsoever.

I had hoped that this might be purely a localized phenomenon. But it now seemed more likely that the invaders were everywhere, streaming out of my bathroom and fanning out across the face of the globe. If in Washington, then surely in New York as well. And Paris, and Mexico City, and Nairobi for that matter. There would simply be no escaping them.

I was obssessed with the idea—the hope—that someone somewhere might also see the invaders. I examined faces on the streets for signs of recognition. I yearned for confirmation that this was not all mere delusion.

How to reach that someone? Advertising. One could never discount the power of advertising. I placed a discreetly but cunningly worded small ad in the classified section of a glossy local city magazine, *Toronto The Good*: "Do you see more than others do? Are you ready to resist invasion? Meet noon, first Friday of the month, Nathan Phillips Square, north-east corner of skating rink. Carry magazine."

It was a brisk winter day as I walked to my rendezvous in the shadow of City Hall. It was rather too brisk, in fact, for skating, the wind chill factor being horrendous.

The turnout was disappointing, but one individual at least had answered my call. Rather unprepossessing, of medium build and medium years, wearing a somewhat grubby raincoat, in the pocket of which was stuffed a copy of *Toronto The Good*, he was

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hardly typical of the dynamic, upwardly mobile group claimed by that magazine for its readership in presentations to our media buyers.

I did not mince words. "You see them?" I asked.

"Oh yes," he said. "Everywhere." He looked around the square. "Even here. At the very center of our institutions of government."

I followed his gaze, but I could see no invaders in the square. Perhaps, like the skaters, they had been deterred by the ferocious wind chill factor.

"Where?" I asked.

"Are you blind?" he asked. He pointed directly across the square. "Invaders," he said. "Intruders. We must put a stop to it."

Following the direction of his finger, I could still see nothing, nothing but a Chinese family hurrying across the square. And then the truth began to dawn on me.

"Wait a minute," I said. "You mean the Chinese?"

"And the East Indians," he said. "And the blacks and the Jews and the Eskimos."

"Eskimos?" I echoed. Despite myself, I was curious. "Isn't that going a little far? I mean, after all, they were here first."

The man grew red in the face. "Lies," he said. "Propaganda. They weren't here first. They came long after us. It's all a fabrication."

"Well," I said, backing away from him, "that's an interesting idea. I'll have to give it some thought. But if you'll excuse me, I have to get going."

"Going?" he said, as I raced away from him. "But we have to stop it."

Matters, from this point, rapidly moved downhill.

Norman appeared in my path as I strode back to work.

"You'll have to do better than that," he said.

I continued walking. Norman matched my pace, hovering at shoulder level. It had begun to snow, but the snow did not fall upon him. Rather it slid around him, as though repelled. No one, however, appeared to notice this curious meteorological phenomenon.

"You're the only one who can see us, you know," Norman said. "We arranged it that way."

I stopped in the middle of the sidewalk and looked up at him. Passersby streamed by, walking in both directions.

"Arranged it," I hissed, in a loud whisper.

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"Yes indeed," Norman said. "We picked you out because of your unusual intelligence and sensitivity."

And then, *poof,* he was gone, all gone away. And I was standing alone on the sidewalk, staring idiotically into empty space. Henderson, naturally, picked this very moment to pass me on his way back to the office.

"Something wrong, Doug?" he asked. "You'll catch your death of cold standing out here like this."

"An idea . . ." I said. "I just had an idea for Truflex."

"Of course you did," Henderson said. "Of course you did."

You'll have to do better than that. What exactly did he mean by that? Why had I been chosen, out of all the teeming billions on this planet for the dubious privilege of being able to see the invaders? And what was I supposed to do about it?

Possibly they expected me to warn my fellow humans. Possibly this was all just a test to gain membership in the Galactic Federation, a test that so far I was failing miserably. Or possibly they were just toying with me, playing some bizarre and utterly inscrutable prank upon me.

After another unproductive afternoon at work, I slipped out early and ducked into a nearby pinball arcade to pour quarters into the video games, exterminating the space invaders and smashing the asteroids to smithereens. Oh, if it were only so easy.

That night I tuned to a phone-in show on a local radio station. The subject was UFOs and extraterrestial life, and an astronomer was pouring scorn on the whole notion. I found myself picking up the phone and dialing in.

"Big Dave McGee," boomed the announcer's voice, "and you're on the air. What is your name sir?"

"Al," I said. "Al Henderson. I'm calling to say that the astronomer is wrong. We have already been invaded. It's happening right now."

"Now?" Big Dave echoed. "Now? How about that! But tell me, Al, surely I would have noticed a little thing like an alien invasion?"

"You would have," I said. "Except that they're invisible. The invaders are invisible."

"Invisible," Big Dave repeated. The man had some sort of repetition compulsion. "Invisible invaders. Well then, how do *you* know about them?"

"I can see them," I said. "Unlike anyone else. You see . . ." I

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hesitated. "They told me I was picked out to see them. Because of my unusual intelligence and sensitivity."

"Interesting," Big Dave said. "But tell me, Al, how did these invaders get here? Did they use an invisible flying saucer, or what?"

"Through a dimensional warp," I said, "in the ceiling of my bathroom."

"Your bathroom, eh? No kidding. But tell me, Al, what do they look like, these invaders?"

"Two, three feet tall. Like small humans. But bald, completely bald."

"And are they green?"

"I'm not joking, Big Dave. This is no joke."

"But are they green?" he persisted.

"Well," I said. "Now that you mention it, you might say that they were a little greenish. I would have to say that, yes."

"Interesting," Big Dave said. "Isn't that interesting? You get to talk to some interesting people on this show. That must have been some very interesting stuff you were smoking, Al."

"I don't smoke," I said. "Not since 1972."

"Just high on life, huh?" Big Dave said. "Well, nice talking to you."

The phone went dead. I had been cut off. I felt totally humiliated.

"How humiliating," said Norman, appearing beside my radio tuner. "How terribly, devastatingly humiliating."

"Why me?" I asked. "Why did you have to pick on me to see you? Why not somebody else? The prime minister, maybe."

"You mean," Norman said, "that you would prefer to remain in ignorance of our presence? Like an ostrich with his head in the sand?"

"Of course," I said. I took a step towards him. "What's the use in knowing about it if I can't *do* anything about it?"

"In the country of the blind," Norman said, "the one-armed man is king."

"The one-*eyed* man," I corrected him. "In any case, spare me your homilies."

I lunged at him. Briefly, very briefly, my hands encircled his tiny but suprisingly solid neck. And then he was across the room from me, giggling to himself.

"So much for direct action," I said.

Events moved rapidly towards their dreadful climax. In a mat-

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ter of days I was summoned to the office of the company physician and submitted to a physical examination.

"There's nothing physically wrong with you," the doctor said. "So what's bothering you?"

"Bothering me?"

"Your supervisor is concerned about you. He feels that you are performing well below your potential. In fact, he has every reason to fire you. But in this company we don't fire someone just because they're having socio-emotional difficulties. We try to get at the root of the problem and correct it."

"An admirable attitude," I said.

"So what is your problem?"

"Problem?" I said.

"It's stress, isn't it?" he asked. "The stress of modern life?"

I considered.

"You may be right," I said. "The stress of it all. In fact, I have been making plans to deal with it better. Just yesterday I bought a pair of running shoes."

"I thought so," the physician said. "Fortunately, our company psychologist happens to be an expert in stress management. Dr. Carver. I believe he is free right now."

He reached for the telephone.

"I thought," I said, "I would see how the running works out . . ."

But it was no use. An appointment was made for me that very moment. The doctor's assistant took my arm and propelled me into the adjoining office, where the resident stress-management expert awaited me.

"I'm Dr. Carver," he said, gripping my hand with an enormous paw. He must have weighed three hundred pounds, a great bear of a man, ounce for ounce the best value in stress counseling in the entire city.

"So?" he asked. "What's the problem?"

"Stress?" I said, rather half-heartedly.

He waved his hands in irritation. "Give me a break," he said. "Don't give me that stress stuff. I'm up to here with stress. Just tell me the problem."

"No problem," I said. "I don't have one."

"Management thinks you do."

I thought hard. "Drink," I said. "I drink too much."

"Really?" he asked. "You don't look like a drunk to me."

I thought again. "Impotence," I said. "That's the problem."

"Alright," Dr. Carver said. "Let's go with that. What happened to make you impotent?"

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"The stress, I suppose," I said. "It just built up and up . . ."

"Oh come on," he said. "You're not really impotent, are you?"

"Yes, I am," I said. "At least, I would be if I tried. With them watching me."

"*Them?*"

The cat, as they say, was out of the bag. It was with a certain measure of relief that I babbled out my whole sad and incredible story.

"No kidding," he said, when I had completed my recitation. "Well that must be a very difficult situation for you. Small and bald you say? Almost like babies . . ."

I had taken enough psych courses in college to follow his drift.

"You think I'm projecting my anxieties," I said. "About parenthood, babies, maturity. But you're missing the point. Babies aren't green."

"True," he said. "You've got a point there. And you say they come from the bathroom?"

"I told you that already. And obviously you don't believe a word of this."

"Why wouldn't I believe you?"

He rose, ponderously, from his desk. "Stay right here," he said. "I'll be back in a moment."

Norman appeared on the desk, just as Carver was making his exit.

"I'd make tracks," he said, "if I were you. Head for the hills. He's going to lock you up and throw away the key."

"Probably," I said. "But why run? Obviously it was bound to come to this. In fact, this is what you wanted all along isn't it? No doubt it appeals to your warped sense of humor."

"Who are you talking to?" Carver asked, from the doorway.

"An invader," I said. "On your desk. On top of those books."

Carver crossed the room and reached out to touch the books. Norman jumped sideways, giggling to himself.

"He moved," I said.

"Of course he did," Carver said, sitting down heavily at his desk.

"I suppose," I said, "that you're going to commit me."

"It's harder than you might think to commit someone," Carver said. "Those days are long gone."

He sighed, with apparent regret.

"You're not endangering yourself or anyone else as far as I can see," he said. "But according to your supervisor, you *are* writing some terribly bad copy."

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"True," I said.

"So let's talk turkey. I've just discussed this matter with Mr. Henderson. It's clear that you need help. Whether or not you accept it is up to you. If you are prepared to commit yourself voluntarily, the company will hold your job open. And I think that's a very decent offer. If not . . ."

"Goodbye," I concluded. "But there's no need for all this. Because I've had it with these invaders. I'm perfectly willing to be cured, if that's at all possible."

It was nearly three weeks later that I left the hospital. I could, of course, have checked out at any time, but my job would not have been waiting for me without a satisfactory progress report from my doctors. And such a report was indeed forthcoming, since I did not see an invader in the entire course of my stay. I had practically persuaded myself that the whole thing had been an acute but mercifully brief psychotic episode.

Nonetheless, Norman was waiting for me when I opened my apartment door. He was sitting on the living room sofa, watching a quiz show on TV.

"All fixed up?" he asked.

"Obviously not," I said, "if I'm still seeing you."

"But you were never crazy," Norman said. He floated up to the ceiling and sat cross-legged on it, looking down. "You should have more faith in the validity of your own perceptions."

"Go away," I said. "Haven't you tormented me enough?"

"Indeed we have," Norman said. "I must agree with you on that score. We have really behaved quite abominably. Unfortunately, we had no other option."

"What are you saying?"

"The thing of it is," Norman says, "we lied to you before. We didn't let you see us because of your unusual intelligence and sensitivity. As you must know, you're hardly above average on those qualities. We had to let you see us because the gateway happened to open up into your *apartment*."

"I don't follow you," I said.

"We could have made ourselves invisible to you," he said. "But not the gateway. We couldn't hide the gateway."

"Why not?"

He waved his hand in irritation. "For various technical-type reasons I can't be bothered to explain right now," he said, "and which in all honesty I barely understand myself. The point is, you would have seen the gateway and possibly alerted native forces

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of social control. They would have investigated. And who knows what they might have done? They might have gained entry into our own world. Or they might have bollixed things up and closed the gateway, trapping us here. It could have been a very messy situation."

"You didn't have to open the gateway in the first place," I said.

"Well we didn't exactly open it," he said. "It was sheer serendipidity, really. Dimensional stresses, and like that. One day it just opened up of its own accord. Into your bathroom. And you could hardly expect us to pass up the opportunity. We get so little excitement."

"So you had a gateway," I said, "and you couldn't hide it from me. So you neutralized me instead. As a credible source of information."

"You neutralized yourself, mainly," Norman said. "We just helped you along a little."

"You had me so confused," I said, "that I never even tried to show the gateway to anyone else. I just assumed they wouldn't see it, the same way they couldn't see you."

"Precisely," Norman said. "At any rate, I am here to apologize. We may be inhuman but we are not inhumane. We genuinely regret any inconvenience we may have caused you."

"Inconvenience!" I said. "That's putting it a little mildly. I don't want your apologies. I just want you to get out of here and leave me alone."

"I am about to do just that," Norman said. "The gateway is already closing from our side, and the others have already returned. I must also be on my way. I waited only to bid you farewell."

"Farewell and good riddance, then," I said.

My long nightmare was finally ending. I felt very calm, suddenly, knowing that it would all be over in a moment. I did not even scream when I saw the other invader begin to emerge through the bathroom door.

The other invader was highly insalubrious. It was yellow and pulpy, with a single eye and many tentacles. No doubt some gruesome invader pet.

It was followed, in short order, by another, and then another.

"Just go away," I told Norman, wearily. "And take those disgusting *things* with you."

"Things?" he asked. "What things?" ●

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CHAND VEDA

by Tanith Lee

Tanith Lee's most recent appearance in these pages was "La Reine Blanche," our July 1983 cover story. In this story, however (taken from a collection called "Indian Nights," soon to be published by DAW Books), the author turns her attention to exotic India, where, even today, wishes can sometimes come true.

art: Odbert

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How ill-named she was, he was thinking, in the moments before the train came off the rails. Gita—his 'song'. But she was not like a song, this fat, sullen young bride of his. It had been a terrible affair, the whole wedding. Because of the other girl, the one who had died before he could claim her, he had come to marriage later than most. Perhaps this, and perhaps the contagion of Western skepticism, made him feel ridiculous as he rode in his tinsel headdress on the back of the tall red horse his foolish family had insisted on hiring (wondering all the while if he would fall off, his nervously gripped thighs aching horribly), while the band marched before and everyone else laughed and shouted.

Vikram had seen a photograph of the girl some months ago. He could tell it was a flattering photograph, even though it had not been able, actually, to flatter her very much. She was a lump of flesh, with small furtive eyes and, as he had found out only today, missing a top canine tooth on the left side. That could be fixed, of course. With his fine business, the book shop, on which everyone always congratulated him so vociferously, he could get money to buy Gita a false tooth. (Why then had her well-off family not seen to it?) But what else could he do? Starve her and work her, maybe, so the pounds of flesh melted away. There she had stood in her scarlet and gold bridal finery, and he had dutifully unwrapped her from her veil, wishing his short-sightedness, in that moment, were worse. And to make it more dreadful still, he beheld at once that she, too, thought herself cheated. If Gita was a poor bargain, so he supposed was he. Yes, it was all very well to talk of masculine pride, but a look in a mirror got rid of that. Thin and ugly and blind wed to fat and ugly and toothless. What a pair!

And in that second, as he remembered, as if to compound the nastiness of it all, there was a wrenching and squealing, and a long juddering, during which the world fell over on its side.

When Vikram had opened his eyes, retrieved his glasses and found both lenses to be cracked—yet perforce put them on again—he discovered it was the carriage and not the world which had changed positions. From every side now, within and without the carriage, came a wailing and crying and shouting. Soon, lights were pouring down the track, and through the upside-down window, in the scream of the flares, legs ran about insanely.

"Are you hurt, Gita?" Vikram asked his wife, who was kneeling beside him with a look of gross ferocity.

"No," said Gita. And, as an afterthought, "Are you?"

"Bruised all over, but nothing broken."

She seemed to sneer faintly at this and he could have slapped

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her. Coupled to the bruising the horse-ride had already given him, the new, minor, all-pervasive and inescapable pain made him feel like weeping.

In a while, a demented official appeared at their upside-down window. After a lot of yelling, Vikram and another man, with some external assistance, succeeded in getting the door open. They, and others, were dragged out. They were not allowed to rescue their hand-baggage, and it was useless to argue. The scene outside was nightmarish, total chaos and confusion. The derailment was comparatively mild of its kind, and few had been hurt, but panic intransigently ruled. Nearby several Moslems writhed on the earth, praying. A goat, which seemed to have been on the train, skipped merrily down the line, butting and bleating.

Vikram stood and watched events through his cracked spectacles. At his side, a dollop of disapproving misery, Gita waited, immobile and witless. People pushed past them. "Well," said Vikram after a time, "shall we walk over there?"

"You are the husband," said Gita. "It is for you to say."

Vikram clenched his fists. He strode, stiffly, up the incline beyond the pushing confusion and the goat, and sat down on a boulder. Gita followed and sat down on another boulder. Beyond the fallen train and the red stream of flares, the night was very black, and far above the stars bloomed bright. Vikram thought of the nights alone, sitting or lying up on the roof of the shop, the stars floating high over the mist of the streetlamps. Waking to find the moon on his face, whiteness soaking through him like water into a sponge. He worked very hard in the book shop. Things were always going wrong. For example, there was the European who came in and stole the glossy paperbacks of temple erotica. One knew he stole them—after he had come and gone two or three of the editions were always missing, and besides he left his cigar-ash along the lines of the volumes, like a calling card. Or the young assistant who took two hours for a midday meal; always some excuse. Or the books which did not arrive on time, or came in too great quantities. And then there was that account which did not balance. And what was he to do about the electric fan in the ceiling, part of which had flown off and damaged one of the stands. Next time it might decapitate a customer, probably one with influential friends. Could he afford the new fan? Well, he would have to. And then all the expense and the time of this, which he had not wanted, this marriage to a monster. He could not stop himself thinking of the other girl, the one who had died. She had not been pretty, but at least only plain. And he had met

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her, once, at her father's house, and she had not hated him and they had laughed together. She had had a lovely laugh; he could not help recalling it. It would have filled his life with silver bells. But there. She was dead and he was no catch and they had found him Gita, and here he was with Gita and a wrecked train, his body feeling as if it had been pounded between stones. It was no good looking at the stars, waiting for the moon.

Presently, another official came, closely pursued by a group of frantic people. Over the cries and imprecations, the official told them all they should follow the guard through the forest, to the station. No, they could not go up the line. There was a land-slip piled across it; it was this which had caused the de-railment. Everyone must go around. Yes, yes, they must.

An elderly woman clung to Vikram, sobbing. She was quite uninjured, but the despair of unforeseen, inevitable, mischance was upon her. He patted her. "There, there, my mother. It'll be all right. Look, there is the guard coming now, with his torch. And we will go to the station and they will give us tea, perhaps, free of charge." He glared over the woman's veiled head at Gita. Gita should have been the one to impart comfort. Who did she think she was, some princess? Had she no compassion?

The guard set off into the undergrowth between the tall trees and the tongued bamboos, his live torch flashing, disturbing things. The woman detached herself from Vikram and scuttled after. Everyone followed, chattering or listless. The newlyweds brought up the rear.

Suddenly Gita said angrily, "Wait! My sandal is caught in something."

Vikram stopped and waited. Behind him, Gita panted and puffed, and the bushes creaked. He did not turn to see. Ahead the flare became smaller. "Hurry *up,* Gita."

"How can I hurry? The strap has caught in a root. I can't see what I'm doing." She sounded furious. It was all his fault, of course. "And you might help me."

So he turned and helped, not wanting to touch even her sandal and unable to see her, fortunately, in the darkness. When it was all attended to he straightened, and the light was gone.

"Quickly," he said then, and hurried forward, to fall headlong amid the eager claws of the forest. Scrambling up, scratched and hot with embarrassment that was invisible, while Gita stood like a rock, he muttered, "That way. Over there." And taking her arm, he pulled her after the memory of the wholly-vanished light.

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All my life now is to be like this, thought Gita as she stumbled along with the thin ugly man, her lord. *Already he has brought me bad luck. The train has crashed. My sandal is broken. He dislikes me and may refuse to buy me a new pair.* She thought of her father's house, but without nostalgia. Her father and mother had not cared for her, either. It was the pretty daughter who had the attention, the bangles, the silk, the attractive husband. Gita did not blame her family. She did not blame Vikram. Although he was so graceless, bony and pock-marked, his squinting eyes full of reproach, it was a shame he had had to marry someone like herself. *But I am a good cook,* she thought defiantly, as a creeper smacked her in the face. *He doesn't know that yet.* Gita's aunts had encouraged her in the domestic skills, while the other sister had been taught everything more casually. After all, if the rice was, for the first months, sticky, the *nan* of an imperfect lightness, this would be forgiven a slender-waisted young wife with huge deer-like eyes. No, Gita did not blame Vikram. She only hated him for hating her, as was quite proper. She had a vague hallucination of their old age together, when she would withhold his favourite dishes (her culinary talent being all she could blackmail him with). Presumably they would have children. She shuddered at the idea of his reluctance or perhaps brutality. And the child, also, as it grew, would probably not like her.

She stopped brooding because Vikram had abruptly halted.

He stood there, an element of hotter denser substance in the hot black night.

"We're lost," he cried. He sounded in a rage.

Nervous, she could not, nevertheless, resist goading him.

"I knew we should be."

"It was your fault, Gita."

Her fault. Naturally.

He waved his arms, and she heard branches crackle and snap.

"Where is the station? Where? Where?" he shouted at the forest. "The guard has disappeared. I can't see anything. What is happening to me?"

It was true, there was no glimmer of light or movement anywhere, and no sound to be heard in any direction.

"Haven't you an electric pocket torch?" asked Gita innocently.

"A pocket torch? I? No, of course not. Did I think when I set out I should be in a train-wreck, abandoned in the jungle?" *But with my bad-fortune,* he thought, *I should have done.*

They stood then for a few minutes, gaping at the blackness to which Gita's eyes at least had somewhat adjusted. It was possible

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to see shapes, or to imagine they were seen, but not to be certain what they were. At last, Vikram decided. "We must go on." And he marched forward again, only to collide on this occasion with the trunk of a tree. As he scrabbled for his battered glasses in the undergrowth, Gita said, with an air of intolerable wisdom, "It might be better to remain where we are. Surely other people from the train will come by. Or if not, we shall see better in the morning light."

"Morning? Morning? You expect me to spend the night in the jungle?"

"I shall have to do so too."

"I must be in the town tomorrow. I have things to see to. You don't understand the modern world. My business— Already I've wasted so much time—"

"Yes," said Gita.

Something in her voice stayed him, but only for a moment.

"*No*," he shouted. "I intend to find the station. Come or stay as you please, woman."

As he rampaged forward once more, Gita picked her way after him. He presented a kind of whirling in the darkness, but mainly she located him by the noise he made, thrashing and crashing, and wild cries of pain and frustration, at length ornamented by swearing. Gita attended with interest, but presently even the oaths died. She came upon him suddenly, seated on the ground, nursing a foot all the toes of which seemed to him to have been fractured on a stone. As she loomed over him, he began to make a different noise, unlike all the others. It was a familiar noise, so personally familiar that she did not at once recognize it from another. Slowly, she realized he was crying.

The fool, she thought scornfully. *What does he think there is to cry about?* But she knew, and a wave of loneliness washed over her, terrible loneliness, for she too had shed tears very often, and now she could not help him, was as much the cause of his grief as anything else.

She sat down. She waited, listening to his sobs which, because they shamed him, he tried to quieten. She waited and waited, and listened and listened, and finally she said, "The moment the sun comes up, you'll easily see the way. It won't take long to reach the station. Then someone will take us to the town. They'll be very sorry. They'll be kind. And when we get there, you can rest. We'll send a message to your shop. Let them do without you one day. You work too hard. Let *them* work for a change. I'll make a *thali*. It will be very tasty. And you'll find I won't be a nuisance

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at all. You can be as free as you want. I shan't fuss. Visit your friends, write your poetry. I understand." She became aware he had stopped weeping and was listening to her. She said, "You'll have noticed, I haven't got a tooth at one side. When I was seven years old a boy from the next house used to run into our courtyard with my brother, and call out at me I was ugly. So one day I took a pan of milk that was curdling and threw it over him. He screeched and yelled, and I was beaten for wasting the milk. But the day after he threw a stone at me and it broke the tooth. So they took me to the dentist's shop and he pulled it out."

In the silence, Vikram gulped. "But that's—dreadful, a dreadful thing," he said.

"What did it matter? If I'd been pretty it would have mattered. But if I'd been pretty, none of it would have happened." She hesitated, then said, "You see, I know how I am. But I'm strong. Don't worry about me. I'll be a dutiful wife. In time, we'll get used to each other."

"Oh, Gita," he said.

How strange, he thought, astonished by her dignity, burned by compassion. He could not see her, and all at once, as her dismembered words were murmured in the blackness, he had become aware that her voice was beautiful. Yes, if he had heard her speak, on a telephone, say, never having met her, he would have visualized another woman entirely, a nymph with high, heavy, rounded breasts, serpent waist, dancer's feet, skin smooth as much-caressed marble . . . . Although Gita's skin *was* soft and smooth, he had noticed it, unconsciously, when he grabbed her arm so roughly. He had a sudden urge to reach out and touch her arm again, gently, investigate the soft smoothness, and if it were true. But he could not make himself.

He sighed. He must say something in response to her own brave effort.

"Yes," he said humbly. "It will be all right."

He heard her settle then, and he himself mournfully settled, a tree against his bruised and aching back. If only it *could* be all right, he thought. She was, after all, a decent girl. She had comforted his sorrow instead of mocking him. She had even mentioned his poetic writing with respect. He removed his glasses in order to wipe his eyes. And at that instant, a dim white glow appeared, far over his head. Too ethereal to be anything sent by the railway company, he knew it after a moment for the rising moon. The light swept like a silver blade through the roof of thinner foliage above them. He did not put on his glasses, simply allowing the

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light to come to him in all its mystery, formless. By his side, Gita did not say anything about the moon.

If only. But if only what? The dream of the moon knew. Soma, binding the earth to the sky by a cord of white fire and divine nectar. If only— Not meaning to, Vikram's glance fell on Gita sitting there passively. Viewed without the glasses, washed in moonlight—yes, that was it. A transformation. The light of the moon, *chand, chandarama,* the silvery, ever-altering one, altering all things— If only he and she might be altered, she for him, and he for her—for she had suffered. By magic, by prayer, by knowledge, by a wish.

He felt himself detached from the flesh, floating in whiteness.

By his side, Gita thought: *Let him sleep.* She lay back on the tree with him, and forgetting her punishments for his old age, mused, *He is a sad man. Ginger is good for sadness. I will put a little extra in the* thali.

When she woke, it was without haste, but with the sensation of something having touched her eyelids, a fingertip or a frond. There was a lot of light now from the moon, which was directly before her, descending the arch of heaven and shining through the clearing. For it was, after all, a clearing they had stumbled to the edge of. Bushes of flowers were all about them, which she had not noticed before, exuding a delicate sweet scent. The warm moon seemed to bring out their perfume, just as the sun might do by day. Despite the discomfort and catastrophe of the earlier part of the night, Gita felt well, soothed, optimistic. She rose to her knees, and looked round to see if her husband Vikram was still sleeping. Then let out a stifled shriek. For Vikram was no longer there, had vanished. In fact, there was someone, deeply slumbering against the tree. But it was a stranger.

After a few seconds, Gita collected herself. There would be an ordinary explanation, no doubt. While she slept, for example, another lost traveller from the train had come by and Vikram had invited the man to join him. Then Vikram himself had had to go off among the trees for the normal reason. Meanwhile the newcomer slept and Gita woke. That was it. She had only to wait a minute or so and her husband would return. And while she waited, she was at liberty to study the stranger, was she not?

Gita leaned a fraction closer, holding her breath.

The moon described him fully, the long strong length of him, relaxed in his sleep as some graceful animal, some panther out of the *rukh.* He was mature, though still young, his skin of a

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velvety darkness on the beautiful musician's hands, the arch of the throat, the face, into the hollows and over the plains of which the moon poured so completely. In all her life, Gita had never seen a living man so handsome. Asleep, soulless, he amazed her. But ah, behind the smooth discs of those closed lids, the thick fringes of those lashes, what eyes there must be— It was her desire to behold them, maybe, which caused her inadvertently to nudge against him. So he woke. So she caught a glimpse of his eyes, the eyes she had longed to gaze upon—large and gleaming, and filled by horror, by terror—

Gita sprang to her feet, gasping and humiliated. To wake him was to cause him to look at her. Yes, she was enough to make him recoil, leaning near enough to embrace him, with what emotions, what stupid desires scrawled across her hateful features? It was but too plain. In wretchedness, she longed to obeise herself in apology, but that also would be improper.

"There is no need for alarm," she said. "My husband will return shortly. But I was surprised, and wondered who you were."

The princely man relapsed against the tree again. He breathed hard, staring at her, trembling, she thought, for his thick jet-coloured hair shivered to the momentum. What should she do now? Too late, she greeted him politely. He did not respond. He said hoarsely, "Your husband?"

"Yes, my husband. My Vikram. Didn't you come from the train and meet him by accident here?"

His mouth, that a fine chisel might have fashioned for a god-being on a temple, was ajar, showing the white teeth. Then his shaking hand came up and set in place on the carven nose, before the wonderful eyes, a pair of cracked and battered spectacles. They did not mar his beauty. Oddly, they enhanced it, a little pinch of the spice of humour, a tiny laughing flaw in his marvel: See, I am not perfect. I am human, too. I may be approached. Oh, one could love him for the silly spectacles perched on his god's face above his hero's body. It seemed he was half-blind, just like Vikram. Gita checked. For not only was he half-blind like her husband, but he had just put on the glasses of her husband. Then with a throb of terror all her own, curiously protective and tigerish, Gita cried at him: "Where is he? What have you done with him—" For surely it was madness that one man might murder another for the use of his broken spectacles, yet this was the forest and who knew what went on here by night— "Oh, Vikram—where is my Vikram?"

The man coughed. He said dully, "I am here."

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Gita gave a scream of laughter. But the laughter was brief and left her. Then she sank down again and peered at him, fighting away the urge to cry, at which fight, in her seventeen years, she had become a veritable champion.

"You? How can you be Vikram?"

"See," he said, holding out his hands to her. She looked and saw rings that she knew. Then she looked again and saw the heroic body clad in Vikram's clothing which somehow fitted it. Then her eyes went back to his face, and the tears came despite herself.

"Oh," she whispered. "What has happened?"

"Don't cry," he said. He seemed to try to touch her, but his hands fell away.

She could not bear it. Some spell or curse had come about, and here she was, the most abject made more abject still. She turned her head and hid herself in a fold of her *sari,* instinctively.

"Gita," he muttered. "Are you Gita?"

Wild anger then in the *sari* fold. "Who else? Who do you think?"

Vikram was not thinking at all. He leaned back on the tree, struggling with great inner turmoil.

At the soft nudge he had woken, the moon across his eyes, and there in the blast of the moonlight was a woman, kneeling close enough that it seemed she had been about to embrace him. Close enough, too, to be easily seen. For an instant he thought it was a dream, but then he knew it could not be, and he was frightened. A poet, he had often read and written of the creatures of the forests, the demons, the nymphs. Her hair was a foaming cloud, her body, traced by silver, flowed and curved, inviting the hands to rest and to journey upon it. Her face had truly the loveliness of something inhuman, an image sculpted from a poreless almond-coloured material that lived, reigned over by two eyes like great black stars.

And then she spoke of her husband. Her husband would be returning. How would it seem? Somehow Vikram had fallen asleep and woken by this gorgeous one, whose spouse would shortly approach and find them. Compromised, attacked, slain—what else could follow? Then he recollected Gita. And then the gorgeous one began to refer to her husband by Vikram's own name, a coincidence that seemed peculiar. He had put on his glasses, to see if she would look differently, but her splendor was only increased. And then she had shouted in fear, and Vikram had seen that she lacked the upper left canine, just as his Gita did. His fat, ugly Gita. And that Gita, fat ugly Gita, finding the nymph had also lost a tooth just as she had, and the same tooth

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at that, being kind, had gifted the nymph with her garments before running away.

But now the beautiful, the fantastical one wept and shuddered in Gita's *sari* fold, and he wished only to console her, drinking the tears of her eyes like nectar. Gita? No, this was not Gita. Although she had snarled at him, *Who else?*

He did not dare lay a finger on such excellence. It was the stuff of fantasy and of poetry. And yet—and yet, in those seconds of her gaze, it had seemed to him that she too saw—

Vikram had not forgotten his demented semi-conscious prayer to the moon. It was solely that the memory was preposterous. In the end, however, he took a deep breath of the perfumed night. He fixed the demon-girl with his impaired vision that somehow consistently beheld her clearly, and said, "Gita, look at me. Look at me and tell me what you see." At which she slapped the earth in a fury with one hand, over and over. So he took the hand, to calm it, and sure enough the hand relaxed. "Gita," he said, "I will tell you firstly—when I look at you—you are beautiful, Gita."

It was possible, he knew, she might berate him, might go mad and tear at him. She had been ugly so long, and unloved always. And if, when she looked at him she beheld the complement of what he beheld, looking at her— She did not know, as he did, what he had asked of the moon. Did not know it had been . . . granted?

But there was knowledge, after all. The moon had filled the darkness with it. Presently, she raised her head and her eyes, and out of her glory she gazed at him. And timidly, but hopefully, she said, "I—*also?*"

Vikram laughed. "*Also.*"

He laughed louder and she laughed too, and both their hands met, and their voices went up like a song into the tops of the forest.

In the dawn, as she had said, it was no trouble to find a way through the trees and thickets. The station appeared against the freshly-lit sky, huddled over by the flocks of people who had had to spend the night there.

They walked closely, Vikram and Gita. Sometimes they glanced shyly aside at each other. The burning arrows of day had had no power over the enduring gift of the moon, and the spell had not faded at sunrise. Each of them stole onward with a supernatural being at their side, tender and accessible, a dream that was also

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a beloved. And, though they did not yet know, a third person went with them now, who was to be the first of their sons.

The refugees on the platform paid them little heed, the skinny squinting man and his fat ungainly wife. There was nothing remarkable about them, except perhaps the profundity of their intimate silence.

In the eyes of others, then, in the mirrors on their walls, reflective surfaces of all types, they saw the truth, or one truth of two. But in the expression of Vikram when he looked at her, Gita saw the second truth, and he, in her eyes, beheld it also. They were, for each other, the one true mirror.

"Well, it is a good marriage," said the relatives and friends, with some surprise.

The book business was booming, the house was a wealthy one. And yes, Vikram had gained some flesh, Gita's cooking, no doubt. Though strangely Gita had lost weight, despite her childbearing. She would never be a comely woman, even without a gap in her teeth, and yet there was something, her walk, her gestures; not unpleasing. And her happiness was gratifying to those who thought they had aided it. He was a solid proposition, was Vikram, and had added dignity to himself as his fortunes steadied. He no longer squinted, but looked levelly through his spectacles. Authority, yes, Vikram had authority. One could ask his advice. And the poetry had won prizes, of course. Who had inspired some of those passages? Well, best not to worry about that. Gita was happy, and there were plenty of children.

And the children really were a miracle. Like gods and goddesses they stalked the lawns and the rooms, turning to their parents with looks of love one all too rarely noted in these unsettled times. Handsome sons, dark as Krishna, and dark amber daughters, all set with jewels for eyes. It was, the relatives and friends observed privately, something of a curiosity, this. For how could offspring of so much—one must say exceptional—*beauty,* have grown from such a very beautiless match . . . ? ●

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A SHADOW UNDER THE SEA

by Mary R. Gentle

The author, a native of Dorset, England, has just sold a novel, *Golden Witchbread*, to Arrow Books, Ltd. This is her third appearance in *IAsfm.*

art: Odbert

"Look!" Ellis shouted. "It's happening again—now!"

Spurlock took the ancient spyglass from her, training it on the sea. Light blinded her, images blurred: then she focused on the distant fishing boat.

"I see nothing."

"Wait . . . there!"

The seawind whipped around them where they stood on the beacon hill. Under the cliffs, the tide beat against Orindol's coast. A calm summer day, nothing to trouble a ship's crew—particularly a crew from the Hundred Isles.

"There's nothing we can do, lady," Ellis of Orindol said bitterly. "Even if we had another ship out there, what could they do against *that*?"

Distant, soundless: Spurlock saw the tragedy. The fishing boat (every minute detail clear, down to the nets spilling silver on her decks, the barefoot running sailors) heeled over and shipped water. Waves broke, spray flew. The boat was tangled in a great bed of floating weed. . . .

"Clingweed?"

"I wouldn't bring you all the way from Shabelit for that, lady."

The boat turned broadside to the wind, shipping water, foundering. Spurlock saw the crew running this way and that in panic,

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saw the soundless gouts of spray where they threw themselves overboard, and the weed-mass moved—

Moved lazily, opened a mouth of darkness.

Timbers floated on the water. Nothing else of the ship remained. The water swirled, then quietened, where the last man had been swimming desperately for the beach.

A great mass slid into the depths, out of sight of the spyglass, down into the hidden darkness. Spurlock lowered the glass, blinking at the suddenly-removed world. She was cold.

"That outsizes my largest ships," she said.

"It's taken five boats in the last month," Ellis said. "Each time the crews were . . . killed. Only a coaster escaped—perhaps because the beast had fed, I don't know—to bring us the news. We didn't believe. Now it comes to our very shore. Lady, you must help us."

Gulls cried, soaring in the middle air between beacon hill and the roofs of Orindol. Spurlock looked down on peaked roofs, tiled and slanting, bowed with age. The early light sent the gull's shadows darting across clapboard walls. Down on the beach, men and women were clustered round the net-drying sheds, talking in the shade of the tall tarred buildings. Fishing-boats were drawn up on the shingle. The fishmarket was closed for lack of business, and there too the Orindol islanders stood talking. The bright sea was empty.

You cannot have the Hundred Isles forbidden the sea, Spurlock thought, chilled. All the Shabelit Archipelago has trade for its life-blood.

"You're First in Council," Ellis urged, "you're lady of Shabelit itself. Help us!"

"That's nothing to send spears against. It would take a warship down as easily as a fishing boat. I won't send Shabelit's galleys."

Ellis looked hopelessly at her. "I know. I knew before I came to Shabelit. We can't kill it. But what am I to say to my people?"

What am I to say to mine? Spurlock thought, with a certain grim humor. How long will I be First in Council if I go away wringing my hands and crying defeat? More to the point, how long will the Peace of Shabelit last when the Hundred Isles hear of it?

The younger woman said, "In the old time, they made sacrifices to the Kraken. That will begin again, now it has returned."

"The Kraken is a myth. That's a sea-beast, nothing more. Listen to me," Spurlock linked arms with the young islander, leading her down the track toward the village, "the first thing you must

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do is leave poisoned bait. Float out a raft with rotten carcasses on it; let it take that for a guts-ache. If that doesn't discourage it, we'll think again."

She left Ellis and the Orindol islanders working and went back aboard the warship. She dismissed all except her aide.

"Well, lady?" Dinu asked. "Will you call the Council to Shabelit?"

"Too long a delay. They'd have to come from all the Hundred Isles. It's all stopgap measures! Sit down," she said, knowing that his wound from the long-past Bazuruk campaign still troubled him. "You're a south-islander. Tell me all the legends you know about the Kraken. I have to think quickly."

"We've lived well under the Peace of Shabelit," Ellis said. Rain had darkened her fair hair, her plain tunic and britches. The *Wind's Eye* rocked gently on the swell. "But if we can't fish, or trade . . . that's when the fighting begins. Durinsir, Merari, Gileshta, Orindol; we're none of us wealthy islands. Lady, if your warships should be penned up in Shabelit—"

"Let's not anticipate. I've no wish to see the old days back. Island against island. . . ." Spurlock shook her head. She wondered if Ellis were old enough to have fought in the last wars, the wars that Spurlock had led to bring about the Peace. "The poison failed?"

"Perhaps it is no ordinary beast."

In the silence, the summer rain was loud; and under it they heard—as you hear anywhere in the Shabelit Archipelago—the beating of the sea.

"Then it will take no ordinary means to defeat it. In my judgment, no other weapon but sorcery. I will leave you my Second, Dinu Vanathri; he will direct you to feed carcasses to the beast, so that it leaves your ships."

"We haven't enough to feed a Kraken's hunger!"

"For a while," Spurlock said. "I am going south, to the Cold Lands."

Ellis shivered. "Lady, I do not know who has the greater peril; we who stay, or you who go to—that land."

"They have powers. We must turn some weapon against the beast."

The Orindol woman bowed respectfully. "I wish you safe voyaging, lady. And I beg you; be as swift as you may. For all our sakes."

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The First in Council should have been received with great honor in the Cold Lands cities, anywhere from Sakashu to Tulkys. Instead, Spurlock took the *Wind's Eye* down past Goldenrock and the Spice Isles, avoiding the populous regions of the Cold Lands, and came within the month to a narrow fiord far down the southern coast.

She left the ship moored there, taking none of her guards when she went ashore.

The valley grass was lush, rising to meet the blue-black forest that seamlessly covered each dip and hollow of the foothills. Above the tree-line, naked rock rose up to the snow. Sharp and cold, glittering white against a sky so dark a blue as to be almost purple: mountains. The wind blew damp.

How long since I went alone into wild country? Too long, she answered herself. A First in Council gains enemies.

She strode on, still a little uncertain of the solid ground after the shifting deck of the *Wind's Eye*. Herds grazed on the lower pastures, and the herders had pitched their skin tents by the river. They sent her on into the hills, towards the mountains and the pass that led eventually to great Tulkys. There, by a spring, she found a stone hut; beehive-shaped, a thin grey trail coiling from the smokehole. *Maresh-kuzor:* the shaman's house.

Spurlock hesitated. Many years had passed since she came to Tulkys, or crossed the pass, or visited this valley.

"Ash!" she called.

When the sound had died, the skin curtain of the hut was pulled back and a woman came out. She wore a skin tunic and leggings. Animal teeth hung on thongs round her neck and were bound into her braided gray hair. As she approached, Spurlock caught the smell of animal fat.

"You look well," she said.

The shaman woman gazed at her. It was oddly disconcerting. Partly it was that her pale eyes, under the broad forehead, were set wide apart; she stared bird-like first from one eye, then the other. Partly it was her indefinable aura of power.

"I know why you are here," she said. "The far-sight brought me a vision of you. Come in, my sister. Talk if you will. I warn you now: I will not leave the mountains. I will not come to the islands."

Spurlock nodded. "Yes. We need to talk."

The years were treating Ash well, Spurlock thought. Apart from the gray hair, you wouldn't guess that she—a handful of years older than Spurlock—must be close on her fiftieth winter.

"I have an armed company on the ship," Spurlock said confi-

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dently. "I could have come here with them. Or, with a little more time, those in Tulkys would have commanded you to my aid. I won't tell you how Shabelit will reward you, because what would that mean to you? I can't bribe or force you. All I can do is come here and ask. Ash, the islands need your help."

The high air was cold. Pale sun gleamed through the hut's entrance. They sat facing each other over the fire-pit. Spurlock leaned back against the rough wall, shifted her scabbarded blade.

"I can't help you. This beast—"

"This beast," Spurlock said, "is the Kraken."

Ash was quiet. At last she said, "Away from this land, my powers are small. If other shamans were with me . . . but none will leave; and they are too widely scattered to be found quickly."

"If you need help, I'm of your blood." Spurlock moved as the setting sun shone in her face. "Will you have it known in Tulkys that you're half-islander?"

"Will you have it known in Shabelit that you are half blood of the Cold Lands?" Ash's gaze was steady. "I cannot speak untruth. You know that."

Spurlock scratched through her cropped hair and sighed. "Ash, I don't like to say this, but . . . I looked after you when we were children, when we thought you were—before we knew it was the shaman-power."

"And you will say I owe you a debt—you, First of Shabelit?"

Taken by surprise, Spurlock laughed. "No. No, I don't think I'll try and persuade you of that."

Ash smiled, losing twenty years. For the first time, there was the old warmth between them.

"Your way isn't my way," Spurlock admitted, "and I have to say I like most things that go with being First of Shabelit. I've earned them. But peace is a fragile thing. You're not stupid, you can see what will happen if I'm beaten here. Every minor lord between here and the Bazuruk coast will be grabbing whatever he or she can get. Then I've to fight all the last battles over again—and I'm not as young as I was."

"And then," Ash said softly, "there is the beast."

Spurlock nodded mutely.

"Wait," Ash said. "I'll see what I see."

Spurlock settled herself in the smoky interior of the hut. Ash went out to the forest, returning some time later with her hands full of small scarlet fungis. She let the skin curtain fall, cutting them off from light and air. She fed the fire, chewing on the fungi, fed it until the stones in the fire-pit glowed white.

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In the hot darkness, Spurlock edged back against the stone wall. She was sweating heavily; the palms of her hands were slick. She thought, What am I bringing back to Orindol?

Ash took up a wooden bucket and threw water on the stones. A sheet of steam hissed up. Spurlock's nails dug bloody imprints in her palms. Her lungs were seared, her eyes wept.

In the long darkness, Ash cried out.

Air was cold on her skin. She blinked, dazzled by early sunlight, and saw above treetops the floating crests of mountains. The stones under her were cold and hard.

My old bones don't like this, she thought as she stood and stiffly brushed herself down.

"Ah." Ash came out of the hut. Briefly she laid her hand on Spurlock's forehead. "You have returned, good. Do you remember anything of your time in the Otherworld?"

Spurlock adjusted the laces of her chainmail, and her swordbelt, before she answered.

"I'm a soldier, not a shaman."

Ash nodded. "I will remind you, as I was with you. This I learned from the Otherworld. Your Kraken is one of those elementals that cannot be killed—she is Water. You can no more slay her than you can prevent the tides."

Spurlock was surprised by a sudden total and overwhelming terror. She gasped as if it was actual pain. When it ebbed, she saw Ash nod.

"Yes. That is the other thing. You islanders depend on the sea. Your children walk decks before they touch land. Yet you suffer foul winds, rocks, treacherous currents, storms . . . she is your special fear, the Kraken; the shadow-soul of the sea itself."

More incredulous than offended, Spurlock said, "You're calling me a coward."

"You come from Shabelit and see the beast . . . you could have sent word by your Second, I know Dinu Vanathri, but no; you board the *Wind's Eye* and sail from Orindol as fast as the winds will take you."

"I had to speak with you," Spurlock protested angrily.

"It will be the same for any islander. She is your fear."

"If you're telling me you won't help us—"

"I didn't say that." Ash regarded her sadly. "I will need your help, sister; but even the sea can be contained. It will not be easy. It may fail. But I will come with you to Orindol."

* * *

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Spurlock studied the charts, and they sailed back up the Archipelago by a route that kept them away from deep water. Ash insisted they stop at Goldenrock, where they took on bales of the weed the islanders call *dekany*. She sat cross-legged on the deck, stumpy fingers knotting a five-stranded web. The *Wind's Eye* sailed, the web grew, and before midsummer's day passed they anchored off Orindol. Ellis and Dinu were there to greet her.

"It's taken ships as far north as Shabelit itself," Dinu said, limping up the shingle beside her. "We thought we'd lost it to Bazuruk's coast, then it was sighted off Sephir, and a few days ago here at Orindol again. Half the Council's here."

"And in a panic, I'd lay bets."

"You'd win, lady." He glanced behind, where the shaman woman was being ferried ashore by Spurlock's guard. "Is that . . . can she help us?"

Spurlock avoided the question. "Ellis, I want all the animal carcasses you can find and spare, on the nearest islands too, as well as Orindol. Dump them where the current will take them out toward the Western Ocean. I want that beast fed."

"We'll do it," Ellis said.

We must be close to it, Ash had said. You must help me, sister.

Spurlock refused to acknowledge her fear. "When you've done that," she said, "find me a small boat—one that can be crewed by two."

Her legs felt loose behind the knees, and her stomach churned. It was a long time since she'd sailed a boat, and she was clumsy. This isn't nerves before battle, she thought, remembering the dry-mouthed excitement that changes to exultation. This is fear.

The boat slid down a hill of water. Waves smacked the bows, and spray shot into the air. Sunlight refracted rainbows. As they came into deeper water the swells calmed. Orindol slid east away from them.

Ash sat with her back to the coffin-sized cabin, checking the knots. Stones weighted the net. It was smaller than even an Orindol fishing-boat's net.

"You must cast it," she said. "I will chant the protection on us. If I fail in that, then it will take us."

Spurlock was lashing the tiller. "You haven't seen it. It's the Kraken! That net wouldn't hold a rock-devil or dire-shark, never mind . . . ah, what's the use."

Ash smiled.

"You might as well hope to net Orindol itself."

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"Then why are you here?" the shaman woman said.

"Those credulous fools on the Council would tell you I won't send someone else to do what I wouldn't do myself—and it's good for me they think that. I won't tell them we're sisters. But believe me, if you didn't need blood kin to help you, I'd be ashore with those others, cheering you on." Spurlock recovered confidence when she heard Ash laugh. "Stand away. We don't need the sail now; we'll drift."

She lashed the sail tight. She went to the side. The ship was so low in the water, she could have dipped her hand in it. The sun shone down, picking out grains of silt. Clear water for a few feet, then murkiness: gold, gold-green, dark. She strained her eyes, searching for movement. A shoal of minute fish darted past, sparking briefly in the sun.

Behind her, Ash breathed in sharply. "*Arak-sha u elish tu—*"

The chant continued urgently. In the depths there was movement. A dark sliding: rising to the edge of vision.

Spurlock saw brown scales crusted with barnacles, clotted with weed; brown scales edged with black. Plate-scales the size of a man's body. Sliding past under them, endless. She stared down into the clear water, searching.

There was no end. To either side the scaled body glided by, a scant few feet under the surface. Seeing it from the beacon hill, one had no idea of its size. Its shadow darkened the sea as far as she could see. The boat was a wood chip floating above it. Crusted flesh gliding under them, bulking in the depths. The boat so fragile, so easily shouldered off into the water—

She was on her knees, her hands knotted on the rail. They were out of sight of Orindol, of any of the islands. There was only the empty circle of the horizon, the tossing boat, and the monstrous body of the Kraken under them. She saw it curve; they spun like a chip in the whirlpool of its turning.

One of the carcass-loaded rafts drifted ahead of them. Spurlock saw the darkness rise. It broke the surface, curving above them, a sliding hoop of flesh that streamed water. The pale underside was puckered with rosettes of suckers. Gently, scarcely seeming to brush it, the loop of muscle closed over the raft. Wood creaked, split with a sound like gunshots. The raft broke up.

"*—anu-elish geir u turaksha ke—*"

Ash's voice rose higher. The weights of the net rolled against Spurlock. Her hands locked on the rail. A lurch of the boat nearly jerked her arms from her shoulders. Spray flooded them. A wave

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burst over the side. Salt water burned her mouth and lungs. She choked.

"—*shansa ke anu*—Spurlock!— *anu keshta kerasha*—"

Ash clung with both hands to the edge of the cabin, chanting, her face twisted with concentration. The coiled net spilled across the deck. Spurlock saw it. She should move, cast it.

The dark behind her eyes was speckled red. She flattened herself against the deck, clinging to ropes, to the mast, to anything. Nails broke, rope-burn scarred her arms. Wood was rough under her cheek.

"—*kazarak u elish-nar*—"

The begging appeal in Ash's voice forced her eyes open. A hill of flesh reared up against the sky. Crusted with weed; white foam spuming down, slicing—

Ash let go the ship, swept and cast the net. The sheer effort halted the chant. She stumbled with the words, missed the rhythm.

The deck slammed against Spurlock's head. She tasted blood. Her eyes clamped shut. She clung to the rail. Under her the world shifted on its foundations. Ash screamed.

The beast came.

Wavelets slapped the side of the boat. All else was silent. The heat of the sun dried her and left salt caked and cracking on her skin. Her hands bore the raw imprint of rope. She stood, slipped down on hands and knees, shaking so violently that she couldn't get up again.

The sea was calm. Snagged on the prow of the boat, the *dekany* weed net was full, stretching with the weight of its catch. Darkness coiled and thrashed in the meshes. At sight of that transformation, she made a dry, unrecognizable sound. It was laughter, relief at being alive, at having survived.

Ash lay cramped between the mast and the cabin. Blood soaked the soft skin tunic, now ragged. Shoulder, ribs, hip, and leg were torn with bloody disc-imprints.

Spurlock crawled across to her. The woman was breathing shallowly.

It's over, Spurlock thought. Hoist the sail and go home. Go home and tell them when Spurlock of Shabelit, First in Council, fought the Kraken—she fell down and cried like a newborn brat. Tell them that, Lady of the Hundred Isles.

She lowered her head and shut her eyes, hot with shame and despair at this final failure, where success was most needed. All

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the hard years between a beggar-brat's childhood in Tulkys and the High Council of Shabelit fell away as if they had never been, as if she had never fought her way up, never imposed peace on the Hundred Isles.

Ash's pulse was irregular. The blood pulsed slower now, soaking the deck. Quick attention might save her. If they reached Orindol. . . .

If I'd awakened a little later. . . .

Spurlock cursed, driving the thought from her mind. It returned. Sister she might be, liar she could never be: Ash would say, when anyone asked her, precisely what had happened here in the Western Ocean. And they would ask. And they would spread the story from one end of the Archipelago to the other: Spurlock has turned coward. The peace is ended. Each island turning against the other.

Spurlock saw very clearly what would happen to the First in Council who had betrayed them.

Ash's eyes opened, sought her face.

"I may be corrupt," Spurlock said, "but I'm the best chance the islands have. What about Ellis and Orindol? They won't care about the truth. All they want is to live in peace."

The shaman woman tried to speak and choked. A thin line of blood ran out of her mouth and down her neck.

"I didn't work all those years," Spurlock said, "to give up what I have now."

She sat by the mast, leaning back against the lashed-down sail, and waited.

It was Dinu Vanathri who found her. The celebrations in the great palace at Shabelit were in their third day and showed no sign of slackening. Spurlock was being hailed as the greatest hero since Bran Double-Axe. He found her in the inner courtyard where fountains tumble into a marble pool deep as a well.

"Lady?"

She was looking into the water. A lean aging woman, court clothes uncomfortable on her as battle-gear never was; a sandy-haired woman with a lined face, and the first hints of age in her movements. Dinu stood beside her.

In the black depths, scales glinted. He saw a coiling far down in the water, glimpses of the Kraken seen as if through the wrong end of a spyglass. He thought of it as he'd seen it off Orindol, and his skin crawled.

"The delegation from the Cold Lands are here," he said. "They

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would like to take the body of the shaman woman back to Tulkys. The lords of the Council say she should be buried here, since it was she who aided you, and so aided us too."

"She was a brave woman," Spurlock said. "We will set up her image in the Great Hall. Let them take her. She loved Tulkys. It's fitting she should lie there."

"She was your friend." Dinu absently ground his knuckle into his aching hip and shifted his stance. "It's a bad thing when friends die."

"I wouldn't be where I am without her."

Down in the shadows, the Kraken stilled.

"Come on." Spurlock said and clapped him cheerfully on the shoulder. "Let's get back to the celebrations. It's what Ash would want us to do, isn't it?" ●

MARTIN GARDNER (from page 59)

THIRD SOLUTION TO TETHERED PURPLE-PEBBLE EATERS

Did you realize that it is impossible to answer the question without being told what unit of length is used for measuring the cube? Call the unit x. The volume of the cube is x^3. The surface area is clearly $6x^2$. We are told that the two values are equal, so we write the equation $6x^2 = x^3$, and solve for x. The answer is 6. We know the cube has a side of six units, but this could be six inches, six feet, or six miles. The size of the cube depends on the choice of a measuring unit. A cube of *any* size has the property called for if we measure it with a unit that is one-sixth of the cube's side!

Our final problem, also involving surface area, is independent of the measuring system. Suppose a cube is sliced by three planes to make eight identical small cubes, each with a side just half that of the original. The total volume of the eight cubes obviously remains the same, but their combined surface area increases. This is why smaller ice cubes melt much faster in a drink than their equivalent volume in large cubes.

How quickly can you determine how much larger is the total surface area of the eight small cubes than the surface area of the original cube? Page 166 gives the aha insight that provides a quick solution.

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by Vonda N. McIntyre

Vonda McIntyre's new book, *Superluminal* (in which this piece will appear), is due out in October from Houghton-Mifflin. Those familiar with Ms. McIntyre's work will recognize this story's (and the book's) universe as the setting she created in her Hugo- and Nebula-nominated novella "Aztecs." To date, she has won two Nebulas and one Hugo, and if this story is any indication, we doubt that she will stop there.

art: Val/Artifact

TRANSIT

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1.

Radu Dracul closed the door softly and walked away from Laenea Trevelyan, whom he had known for such a short time yet loved for so long.

There was no point in waking her, no point in prolonging their good-byes. Nothing he and Laenea could say to each other would make any difference. Brutal experience had taught them the reason starship pilots did not mix with the crew. The change they submitted to made them incompatible with ordinary human beings.

Laenea was a pilot, and Radu was an ordinary human being. He had documents from the pilot selection committee, which had turned him down, to prove he would never be anything more.

So Radu Dracul closed the door, slung his dufflebag over his shoulder, and walked away.

He entered the elevator. It rose smoothly toward the surface of the sea. No one joined him, for which he was grateful. He felt incapable even of civility, much less conventional social pleasantries.

He felt more alone than he had at any time since his home world's plague. After it, he had grown so used to being alone that loneliness had ceased to bother him; and on Twilight he had had his dreams. All that was changed. Reality had overtaken the dreams, fulfilled them, then shattered them completely.

Outside, in the dark, the sea wind caressed Radu's scarred face and ruffled his hair. The smell of rocket fuel tinged the breeze, but not too strongly to destroy its freshness. The tangy and, to him, quite alien winds of earth made him homesick for the deep forests and cloud-laden, crystalline atmosphere of his home world.

He felt he *had* to get away from the spaceport and away from earth.

A tram waited for passengers on the perimeter track, but Radu decided to walk. He had plenty of time to get to the control office before the next shuttle liftoff to Earthstation. He set off down the footpath.

Damp metal surfaces gleamed beneath the powerful lights. Radu moved from areas of harsh illumination toward patches of pure dark grazed by moonlight. He was glad of the long walk. It helped him think—though he knew he would not suddenly come upon some magical idea that would allow him and Laenea to remain lovers. Nothing would help him do that, but walking fast, pushing himself, stretching his muscles, felt far better than sit-

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ting at the shuttle gate, waiting and chasing himself in mental circles. Besides, he needed the exercise. He was used to much more physical labor than he got as a member of a ship's crew.

He brushed his hand across his hair and his fingers came away damp with dew or sea spray. That brought him a sudden vivid image of Laenea, her long dark hair glistening as they walked together through the fog, their arms around each other, wrapped in her velvet cape.

The long walk helped. Trams passed him several times, moving silently through the darkness along their magnetic tracks. Toward the center of the spaceport bright lights waxed and waned among clouds of vapor from supercooled fuel.

The control office lay nestled in a low complex of buildings at the corner of the landing port. Radu reserved a place on the next shuttle to Earthstation, then requested the transit schedule. Several flights listed crew berths open. As Radu was about to apply to a ship traveling as far as New Snoqualmie, a colony world not unlike Twilight, he noticed the ship was piloted.

He cursed. The last thing Radu wanted right now was to travel in the company of a pilot. But only a few of the available automated ships offered crew positions. Since automated ships still held the numerical majority, this was a fluke, a coincidence of his misfortune.

None of the other destinations particularly appealed to him. Since one of Radu's excuses for leaving Twilight was that his home world needed the foreign exchange he would earn, he chose the automated flight that paid the most. He would crew it on its outbound stops, then, if he could, transfer to another ship traveling even farther. He wanted to travel as close to the limits of explored space as possible. He had applications in for exploratory missions, of course, but so did almost every other crew member he had ever met. They applied out of curiosity, for the excitement, for the money. Radu had very little seniority and it would be quite a while before he could hope to win such an assignment.

Instead of an electronic approval, the response to his query was a personal reply.

"Radu, how are you?" The crew member whose translucent image formed before him was a normal-space navigator with the credentials to prepare an automated ship for transit. Atnaterta looked much older than the last time Radu had seen him. For Radu that was only a few weeks ago, but the subjective duration might be much longer for Atna. The lines in his ebony face were more heavily sculpted, and he seemed exhausted in a way that

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could never be eased by transit sleep. His hair was graying from a black as deep as that of his skin and eyes. Radu trusted his ability and his experience. Most of all he valued his serenity. He was glad to see him.

"I'm fine, Atna." It would be too complicated to reply to a purely social question with the convoluted truth.

Atna's response took a moment to relay from Earthstation to a satellite to Radu.

"Can you catch the next shuttle? We need a third."

"Yes, I already have a reservation." Again, the awkward pause of light-speed's limits.

"Good. I'll put you on the roster."

An approval notice formed the air into small lighted letters.

"Thanks, Atna."

"Good to have you."

He signed off.

The trick of Radu's mind that let him always know what time it was, anywhere he was, did not help him know when the sun would rise. Looking toward the east, he searched for a glimmer of light, even false dawn. In the few days he had been on earth he had never seen the sun; he had never been outside in daylight. But until right now he had neither noticed that nor cared. He would have liked to see earth illuminated by its sun, but he would be gone too soon. Perhaps he would never come back.

He boarded the shuttle and waited for liftoff.

Acceleration pressed him into his seat, back toward the earth. But the shuttle escaped, as it always did, and while it did not leave behind his hurt or his memories, it was taking him to a place where he would be busy enough, at times, to forget both for a while.

By hurrying through Earthstation from the shuttle to the transit dock, propelling himself recklessly through the freefall of the old station's central corridors, and barely pausing long enough to show his ID at the transit dock, Radu managed to reach Atna's ship before its departure. He stepped into its self-contained gravity field.

He paused in the control room long enough to regain his equilibrium and to say hello. The older man stood up to greet him. Atna was nearly as tall as Radu, but very slender. His skin had begun to acquire the papery softness of old age.

"I'm glad to have you on board," he said. He stood back, his

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hands on Radu's shoulders, and smiled. "But I'm afraid you've come in low again."

"I don't mind," Radu said. He was used to having the least seniority and to drawing the ship's housekeeping tasks.

"Ah, Orca," Atna said. "Come and meet Radu."

Radu turned. He had not heard the other crew member arrive, she walked so softly in her rubber-soled red deck shoes. Like many crew members she dressed flamboyantly. She wore silver pants, a silver mesh shirt, and a spangled jacket with a pattern like fish scales: silver, gold brass, red copper. Her skin, set off by her very short, pale, fine hair, was smooth mahogany tan, and her eyes were black. Her hands were rather large in proportion to the rest of her.

Radu glanced at her hands again, surprised. She was a diver.

"Hi," she said, extending her hand. They clasped wrists, and the translucent webbing between her fingers darkened against the black cuff of his shirt.

"Radu Dracul, of Twilight," Radu said.

"Orca, of the Harmony Isles, on earth." She grinned. "I'm afraid my given name is impossible to say, out of water."

Radu had very little time to wonder about a diver's being on the crew. Atna sent them both off to finish preparing the ship for transit. While Orca made the last checks on the engines and Radu shut down all the semi-intelligents, Atna undocked and eased away from Earthstation. Then Radu and Orca prepared themselves and their sleep chambers, and hugged each other, as crew members always did, to say goodbye.

"Sleep well," Orca said, and closed herself in. Radu climbed into his body box, lay back, and pulled the lid shut. The ship would float gently toward its transit point and pause just long enough for Atna to shut down the cerebral functions of the navigational computer and send himself into deep, sound sleep. Then the ship would vanish, diving into transit. But transit was something Radu knew he would never see.

He caught the familiar sweet smell of the anesthetic, and fell instantly asleep.

As he awakened, Radu remembered his dreams fondly. He had dreamed of Twilight, and of his clan, and of the few days, the time he could count in hours, that he and Laenea had spent together. It seemed as much fantasy as the dreams themselves.

Then he was fully awake, and he remembered that his home was far away and all his family dead of the plague that had only

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scarred him; he remembered that he and Laenea were now and forever beyond each other's reach.

Radu pushed up the lid of his sleep chamber and rose.

Someone touched his arm.

Radu started violently.

"I beg your pardon." The pilot beside him was small and frail looking, with very fine black hair and very pale translucent skin. Radu remembered having seen his picture, and of course he knew Vasili Nikolaievich by reputation. He was the first person ever to become a pilot without having served on the crew. And he was a very good pilot.

"You—startled me," Radu said. He would have been startled to meet Vasili Nikolaievich at all, much less to find him, unannounced, on a ship that was supposed to be automated. The administrators generally sent Vasili on important flights that required fast round trips: diplomatic missions, or emergencies. "I didn't expect a pilot, and I'm usually the first to wake up."

"You are this time, too, but I thought you might need help." Unlike every other pilot Radu had ever seen, he wore his shirt buttoned high. It covered all but the tip of the pilot's scar, where his natural heart had been removed and replaced with a pulseless rotary machine.

"This was supposed to be an automated ship," Radu said. He immediately regretted his churlish tone, but the last thing he wanted to see right now was a pilot. He rubbed his face with both hands, as if he could wipe away the last languor of transit sleep. "This *was* supposed to be an automated ship," he said again. For any pilot to be reassigned so late was unusual; for *this* pilot to be sent hinted at extraordinary circumstances. "What happened? Were we diverted? Is this an emergency flight?"

"I don't know," the pilot said. "Nobody said it was."

"Didn't you ask?" Radu glanced around. Only the sleep chambers cradling his fellow crew members were in use. The ship carried no passengers, no medical people.

"No," the pilot said.

"Do we have medicine in the cargo? Hospital equipment?"

"We don't have any cargo at all," the pilot said. "They switched the full module for an empty one."

"But why?"

"I told you. I don't know. To tell you the truth, I don't much care." He scowled. "My bid was up for exploration when the administrators ordered me onto this milk run, and there isn't another x-team mission scheduled for six months."

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"Perhaps this isn't a milk run," Radu said.

"Compared to an x team?" Vasili's laugh was sarcastic. "Look, I only came in here because I thought you might need a hand. The crew usually does after a long trip. But you don't, do you?"

Radu's momentary flash of excitement and anticipation subsided. He felt he owed someone, somewhere, the same kind of risk that Laenea and the others had taken on the mercy mission to Twilight during the plague. But this trip was like all the others, neither danger nor heroic rescue, only the transportation of frivolous goods for the profit of the transit administrators.

"No, I need no help," he said to the pilot, and, after too long a pause, "thank you." He sat down to put on his boots, and pretended to be concerned with a worn place on his right sock. His hands were shaking, not because he had been startled or because he had thought, if only for a moment, that he was by chance on an important or dangerous mission. He was trembling because the pilot was so near. His heart beat faster. He tried to control his pulse. He knew that his discomfort would continue as long as Vasili Nikolaievich stayed beside him.

Despite the danger, his adverse reaction to Laenea had until now caused him only grief, not fear. But if their intimacy had sensitized him to *any* pilot, then he might eventually have to quit the crew. That did frighten him.

The silence lengthened. Radu did not look up. The pilot turned away and left the box room.

Radu released the breath he had unconsciously been holding. He heard the pilot continue on into the crew lounge, to the passageway beyond, and to the pilot's cabin. The door opened, and closed solidly.

Ignoring his worn sock, Radu pulled on his boots and stood up. His heartbeat slowed to a more normal rate. He wiped his forehead on his sleeve. He had never heard of a crew member who responded to a pilot the way he did. But, then, the pilots never spoke of their incompatibility with other human beings, either. They simply kept to themselves. Maybe that prevented ordinary people from reacting to them.

Radu checked the other body boxes. Neither Atna nor Orca had yet reached a state approaching consciousness, so he left them alone. He walked quietly through the lounge and past the pilot's cabin, to the control room beyond.

At the sight of the viewport he stopped, astonished.

An emerald-green, cloud-wisped world hung just above them. The ship had surfaced out of transit with accuracy impossible for

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an automated ship and unusual for a piloted one. Most ships returned to normal space in more or less the correct region, too close for another dive but far enough away that the crew had to travel in real time at subluminal speeds, for a week, or a month, unable to escape the boredom even with transit drugs. They were too toxic for any use but sleeping through transit.

Sometimes a ship surfaced so far off its course that it had to dive again. And sometimes the ships went so far astray that no one on board could figure out where they were, and so they were lost. At least that was what everyone assumed happened to lost ships; there was no real evidence that they did not remain in transit forever, and some theoretical evidence that they did.

Radu glanced again at the bright world above, impressed despite himself by the pilot's skill. Vasili Nikolaievich's reputation was well earned.

Curious about the changes in the flight, Radu requested the ship's log. Not only had they given up their cargo and acquired a pilot, but even their destination was new: Ngthummulun. Radu might as well not have bothered to look it up. He had no idea how to pronounce it.

The schedule showed a brief stopover here and a direct route back to earth. The bonus offered for a fast trip was so large that it easily explained the last-minute changes as well as Vasili's reassignment. The crew's bonus, which was generous enough to surprise Radu, would be only a fraction of the amount the transit authority collected for itself. Nevertheless, Radu did not want to go back to earth. He could return without landing, of course; he could sign onto another ship immediately. But this unexpected change in his ship's course made his abrupt departure nothing more than foolish.

Radu cursed softly. He had too little seniority even to complain, as if a complaint after the fact would do him any good at all.

The potential profit caused the diversion, that was clear. But the log neglected to mention what cargo or what mission was worth the extra cost.

He returned to the lounge and started a pot of coffee. He had drawn cooking duty, of course, as usual, but he enjoyed it and never understood why it was assigned by default. He started putting together an ordinary stew that everyone could season as they preferred.

At a sudden noise he hurried into the box room. Atnaterta tried to pull himself upright.

"Atna, wait, let me help."

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Radu took him by the shoulder and arm and eased him from his sleep chamber. The navigator was shivering, deeply and steadily. Radu hugged him, rubbing his back, until after a few moments the older man responded with a brief, sleepy embrace. Gradually, his shivering subsided.

"Thanks," he said, "I'm awake now." He looked tireder and older than before the journey. He picked up his thick sweater and zipped it on. He was always cold on the ship.

Radu helped him to the lounge, fetched him some coffee, and sat down across from him.

"What happened? Why is the ship piloted?"

Atna wrapped his long fingers around his cup, savoring the warmth. "They flew Vaska out to us. We were nearly at the transit point when the listing came through. Some ship was going to be ordered to take it, so . . . I volunteered us. I hope you don't mind."

Radu shrugged. Anger was pointless; the deed was done.

"Why?" he asked.

"Ngthummulun is my home world, so I suppose I have to say pure selfishness," Atna said smiling. "We don't buy many offworld goods, so ships don't come here often. I haven't been home for a long time."

"Why are we going there now?" Radu tried to memorize how the planet's name was pronounced.

"I can't be certain," Atna said. "But as it isn't an emergency, I think I know. Perhaps I'll be able to show you."

Radu was curious to hear more, but he heard the sharp click of a sleep chamber lid. Atna moved to get up.

"I'll help her," Radu said. "You finish your coffee."

"All right. Thanks."

Radu opened Orca's sleep chamber. She shifted, regaining consciousness. He took her hand gently, afraid he might injure the delicate swimming membranes. But when she closed her fingers the web folded out of the way. He helped her up. She smiled sleepily and slid her arms around his waist, hugging him tight while he enfolded her in his arms and stroked her back and shoulders to ease the cramps. Her long, sleek, swimmer's muscles tensed and relaxed beneath his hands.

She sighed deeply. "Thanks." She let him go and rubbed her eyes with her fists, then combed her short, pale hair with her fingers. It fell back into place exactly as it had been, nearly smooth, not quite rumpled.

"You're welcome," Radu said.

"How did Atna come through?"

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"Fairly well. He seems tired, but I think he's all right." He explained about the ship's being diverted, the pilot, Atna's home world.

"Every time I see him, transit's taken a little more out of him." Orca shook her head, flinging away the worry, and grinned, "I'm glad he finally decided to take a vacation."

Orca tolerated transit sleep as well as anyone Radu had ever met. She stretched luxuriously. "Is that dinner I smell? I'm starved."

"It'll be ready soon."

They returned to the lounge, where Atna sat hunched over his coffee.

Everything about Orca—her prominent canines, her lithe walk, her narrow hips and small breasts and large eyes and hands—all her features were at one end or the other of a normal range, so except for the swimming webs Radu could not tell what about her was inherent and what intentionally changed. He admitted his fascination to himself. Whatever factors had formed Orca, they combined into a being of ethereal grace. She was not by any classical definition beautiful, but she was striking. Somehow it made Radu uncomfortable to find her so attractive, because he felt as if he were betraying Laenea.

"Hi, Atna." Orca kissed the navigator's cheek. He patted her hand. Radu set another cup of coffee on the table. Orca took it gratefully and sipped it, black.

The intercom clicked on. "One hour to pre-orbital check." The computer's voice gave no indication of the urgency its message implied. The crew had more than an hour's work to do.

Radu stood up quickly, thinking, A lot of good it does you to always know what time it is, if you don't pay attention.

Water dappled and streaked the surface of Ngthummulun in thousands of rivers and millions of lakes that touched the infinite shades of green with blue and blue-gray and silver. Ngthummulun had only primitive landing facilities, so the cargo truck had to be taken down by hand. Atna had turned the controls over to Radu, and Radu was nervous. Vasili had made it clear that he expected the cargo back through the first launch window. That meant no aborted landing approaches, no second tries.

Radu drove the truck closer to the surface, diving in at a steep, fast angle. The paisley patchwork of the land stretched and spread. All the shades of green and blue, mottled specks from high overhead, grew into discrete spots, then, as the truck neared

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the ground and the horizon flattened and receded, the little ship skimmed over a single color at a time and the borders whipped past as blurred uneven lines.

Radu concentrated on controls and signals. The forest swept away beneath him, deep green velvet streaked here and there with sparkling patches as bright as snow. The landing strip appeared suddenly, a violent slash, a dark canyon.

"You're fine," Atna said. "Quite nice."

The truck slid between the trees; Radu slowed it and touched down as smoothly as he ever had in the simulator. Easing on reverse power, he braked the ship. It glided to a halt. He hesitated for a moment, leaning tensely over the controls, then sat back and let out his breath.

"Very good," Atna said. "Couldn't have done better if we carried gravity."

"Thanks," Radu said. Delayed tension took over. Until now, Atna's easy manner had kept him from noticing how severely his competence was being tested. It had sufficed. He had made no mistakes. If the cargo was ready, the truck could catch the next window back to the ship. Radu was happier to have pleased Atna than he was relieved to have kept, so far, to Vasili's timetable.

Radu opened the hatch. The hot, humid air rolled in on him. Tropical regions always surprised him with the force of their climates.

He jumped to the runway and glanced back, ready to give Atna a hand. But the older man moved freely and with more animation. He looked around at the rain-dazzled forest and took a deep, slow breath of the air of his home world.

A large ground truck approached them, its wheels spraying sails of water from every puddle. Atna took off his sweater. Radu was tempted to take off his shirt, but he wore nothing under it and he did not know if it would be proper.

When the ground truck stopped, Atna greeted the loading crew fondly in a languge Radu had never heard. Atna introduced him to his friends, and they all switched back to speaking Standard.

"What are you shipping?" Atna asked.

"Wyunas," said the loading crew chief. "The first crop."

Atna laughed. "So that *is* what all this is about! Sending a message probe, hiring a pilot, diverting a ship—" He laughed again, an amused low chuckle.

The crew chief laughed too. "I suppose they think they ought to start out with some fanfare."

"It gave me a start at first, I don't mind telling you."

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"We had good growing weather, and an early harvest. There's a major holiday cluster on earth that the first shipment will catch, if the ship makes the deadline."

"It will make it, with Vaska piloting—but the express charge will eat up the profits," Atna said dryly.

His friend shook her head. "If they sell the wyunas for what they expect to, the cost of the ship and the pilot will be negligible in comparison."

Atna gave her a quizzical glance.

"Don't look so skeptical—hope they're right," she said. "We need the currency." She clasped his hand. "It's good to see you home, Atna. Can I give you a ride to town?"

"Thanks, yes."

"Good. Till we're done, then." She patted his arm, then she and the others opened up the cargo hatch and began transferring small boxes marked "fragile" from the ground truck to the ship.

"What are wyunas?" Radu asked.

"Come along. Perhaps I can show you."

Atna led the way through a forest bordering the field. A path crossed marshy ground between huge fern trees. Radu followed up a gentle rise to the far bank of a narrow valley. The path grew drier and the trees shorter, but the fronds still reached well over his head. He brushed against one thick stem and the tree showered him with droplets of water.

Atna peered through branches into a clearing.

"Good," he said. "This orchard is unharvested." He pushed the ferns back and stood aside.

It was as if he had broken through into a winter forest after an ice storm. The trees' bare limbs sparkled like diamonds. Radu followed Atnaterta into the ice forest until they were surrounded by silver and black. Fallen leaves lay mushy and rotting on the ground, but the bark of the trees sprouted thousands of marble-sized transparent spheres, all intricately patterned inside and out in loops and swirls, shaped by the uncertainties of their growth. Each was slightly different, like a snowflake or a fingerprint.

The trees sang, so delicately that their windchime whisper was inaudible anywhere but among the shimmering crystals.

Atna stripped several from the end of a branch and handed them to Radu. They fractured the sunlight into a hundred tiny rainbows, sparkling among the arches and prisms.

"Are they seeds?"

Atna laughed. "To tell you the truth they're more like warts. Tree warts. That's something we don't intend to mention too prom-

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inently in the advertising. They aren't infectious, of course—the host organism has to be specially adapted and sensitized or the wyunas won't grow at all. But 'tree wart' isn't an aesthetically pleasing name."

"You're right. 'Wyuna' is better. But what are they?"

"They're our cash crop. We needed one, so we invented it."

Radu nodded. Twilight exported the hardwoods that grew in its high forests. But Ngthummulun was terraformed. It had started out a dead world. Everything growing on it had been brought from earth or hand-evolved here.

"I mean, what do they do?" He imagined some complicated electronic function that could be attained only by enzymatic manipulation of matter into forms too delicate and precise to be created by mechanical technology.

"Do? They don't do anything. They're jewels, if you like. They're decorative. That's the sort of thing that succeeds in the earth trade."

"Oh." Radu felt vaguely disappointed. Electronic components would all have been the same. He should have thought of that. Each wyuna was unique: success rewarded uniqueness in the earth trade. Most imported items were merely decorative. The wood Radu's home world exported was beautiful, but it could be put to useful purposes. Still, for all Radu knew, once it reached earth it was carved into meaningless trinkets.

He held a jewel up to the light, for one last glimpse of its spectral colors. Then he lowered it and extended his hand to Atna, to return the wyunas.

Atna stared at them, his face expressionless.

"Atna? Are you all right? What's the matter?" Radu touched Atna's arm.

"What?" Atna looked up, stepped back, shook his head, and gazed again at the jewels. "No," he said. "Keep them." His voice was distant. "Give some to Orca and Vaska, if you like. They'll be a curiosity on earth. For a few days, anyway."

"All right. Thank you." Radu put the organic jewels in his pocket. "Are you sure nothing's wrong?"

"Yes."

It was time to return to the landing field; Radu felt the minutes flowing gradually toward takeoff. Back in the forest, the pale ferns concealed the iridescent orchard.

Atna led in silence, staring at the ground, his shoulders hunched. Even his footsteps were noiseless. Sunlight passing through foliage dappled his dark skin with gold and green. At the

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edge of the runway, among uncleared stumps and weeds, he stopped. The truck had been wheeled out to the end of the landing strip again, ready to take off.

"Goodbye, Atna."

They embraced, as crew members always did when parting. Atna put his head on Radu's shoulder and hugged him tightly, and Radu rubbed his hands up and down the older man's back, just as if he were helping him awaken. When Atna drew away, he held Radu by the shoulders as if unwilling to let him go.

"Something *is* wrong," Radu said.

"Don't leave," Atna said. "Don't go back to earth. Something's going to happen."

Radu frowned, curious, confused.

"You're in danger."

"In danger? What—?"

"In the orchard, I saw . . . I can't explain to you what happened. You didn't grow up here, you wouldn't understand. I dreamed . . . I had a vision. I'm afraid for you."

Radu stared at him blankly. "I don't . . ."

"Something's going to happen to the ship and you're part of it," Atna said desperately. "You're in the middle of it. I think perhaps you *are* it."

Radu shook his head.

"Don't dismiss me!"

"But I have to go back to the ship."

"Of course you have to take the cargo back, but Ngthummulun has a shuttle truck. I can send it for you. And for Orca. Tell her there's a lovely place to swim, a deepwater mountain lake—"

"It's impossible." Radu stepped away from him. "The ship can't fly without a crew."

"Vaska can get the ship from orbit to a transit point. After that it doesn't matter. I don't think it will ever come out again."

"I'm to warn Orca, but desert the pilot?"

"You can tell him if you want. But he won't pay any attention. Pilots never think they can fail. I can't save him. I can't save the cargo. You and Orca are the only ones I can warn."

"But you *know* it's impossible."

"At least give Orca a chance to decide for herself. Will you tell her what I've said?"

"She'll have no choice, either!"

"Please tell her, Radu."

"All right!" In his confusion, he spoke harshly. He regretted

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both the harshness and the agreement instantly. "Atna, I have to leave."

Atna hesitated. "You're sure?" The tension had gone from his voice.

"Yes."

"Then goodbye."

They hugged again, briefly and without intensity. Atna behaved as if he thought of Radu as already dead, already lost.

He turned and walked into the forest without another word.

After an unexciting flight, Radu docked well, sliding the shuttle against its fittings with a satisfying sharp snap that rang through the craft's skin. He relaxed his hold on the controls. His knuckles were white and his palms damp.

He had wanted to dock perfectly, but did not quite know why it was so important. To prove he thought nothing of Atna's visions? To show off? If so, to whom? Orca? Vasili?

"Hurry in," the pilot said over the radio. "I want to leave orbit immediately."

Amused despite himself, Radu realized that the pilot would hardly even notice anything as trivial as a good manual docking in normal space.

Radu went reluctantly into the control room to speak to Vasili. The pilot lay back in his chair, watching the computer display as it changed in colors and waves before him.

"Something's wrong. Vasili Nikolaievich," Radu said. "Atna said some very odd things to me. I'm worried—"

Vasili cut him off, laughing. "You mean he told you your fortune?"

"Well . . . I wouldn't put it quite that way."

"People from Ngthummulun are always claiming to know the future."

"But he thinks the ship will be in danger if it goes back into transit."

"Forget it."

"He asked me to tell you."

"I said forget it!" Vasili said, annoyed. "It doesn't mean anything."

"All right . . ." Radu fingered the wyunas in his pocket, drew one out, and offered it to the pilot. "Atna said to give you one of these, if you want it."

Vasili glanced at it with disinterest. "Thanks, but I don't wear

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jewelry. Can you find out how long Orca will be? We're near a transit point."

Feeling that he had behaved stupidly ever since waking up, Radu shoved the wyuna back into his pocket and left.

Radu climbed down into the engine room. The high and low notes of the resting transit engines beat together around him. The amber light of an information display glowed beyond banks of control nets. He started toward it.

"Orca?"

"Just a sec."

Kneeling beside one of the nets, reaching deep into its interstices, Orca watched the display that hung in the air beside her. She was forcing the repair of a broken connection. The information she was reading looked, to Radu, like numbers studded along a tangle of electric-orange string. From his point of view the numbers were backwards.

Radu watched quietly, until Orca sat on her heels with a sigh, freed her hands from the net, and stretched. The data block faded out.

"Nice docking," she said cheerfully.

"Thanks," Radu said, pleased she had noticed.

"How's Atna?"

"He sent these." Radu handed her several of the wyunas.

"So that's why we're here," she said. She looked at them closely. "They're even prettier than he said. Thank you. But how is he?"

"He looked much better after he landed . . ." After what Vasili had said, it seemed hardly necessary, indeed foolish, to tell Orca of Atna's fears. Even if he had promised.

"I've been worried about him," Orca said. She raised one eyebrow, silently questioning the uncertainty in Radu's tone.

"He's worried about us," Radu said. Because he *had* promised.

"Why?"

"He had . . . a premonition, I suppose . . . that something will happen to the ship in transit. He wants us to stay behind with him."

Orca cupped the wyunas in her webbed hand, shook them so they rang together softly, and stared at them intently.

"He was very upset," Radu said. "He made me promise to tell you and Vasili Nikolaievich. The pilot said it was nothing." When Orca did not reply, he continued. "If you want to stay—"

She touched his hand without looking at him, and he fell silent. He watched her, disturbed by her reaction. Two short vertical

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frown lines deepened on her forehead, then smoothed. The engine's eerie pulsations continued; the windchime touch of the wyunas reminded Radu of Ngthummulun's forest.

Orca took a breath, exhaled, and closed her hand into a fist.

"All right," she said. "It's all right. What were you saying?"

"Do you want to go down to Ngthummulun?"

"No. Do you?"

Radu shook his head. "Then you agree with Vasili, that there's nothing to Atna's dream?"

"On the contrary. Atna's dreams are as real as this world. They're another level of reality. Another way of perceiving things. I'm not explaining this right. I'm not sure you can, in Standard. If we were underwater—" She shrugged helplessly.

"You're staying on the ship."

"I don't get any resonances from his perception. I don't feel a threat. To me, I mean."

"I would have assumed you'd dismiss it out of hand."

"No—and I would have assumed you'd take him more seriously."

Radu shivered suddenly.

"I'm sorry," Orca said, in response to his silence. "I didn't mean that as an insult."

"No, I—I didn't take it as one. I just can't . . ."

Again she waited for him to finish his thought; again he failed to speak.

"Atna's frame of reference is a whole lot different from mine, and I suppose from yours," Orca said. "But I've learned to take it seriously."

They walked together back to the crew lounge, to report to the pilot, to make the final preparations for transit, and to make the preparations for sleep on which their lives depended. At a porthole, Orca paused and looked out at Ngthummulun.

"Besides," she said, "this place has a million lakes and no ocean. I'd sooner vacation in a bathtub."

2.

Laenea was calling to him, she needed him, as he had needed her—

A raucous siren penetrated the last thin haze of transit sleep, dissolving Radu's frightening dream. He fumbled for the latch on his body box. The lid clicked open. He pushed it aside and climbed

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out, made awkward by the remnants of anesthetic chemicals, and confused by memories recalled by his dream.

The dim light faded, and in the twilit last moment the ship began to spin. Its motion threw Radu against his sleep chamber. He struggled to his feet, reaching out to get his bearings in the darkness. But as he oriented himself toward the control room the synthetic gravity contracted, twisted, and flung him down.

He lay still, waiting for the ship's convulsions to end. Waves lapped over him, slow and dry, not of water but of weight and weightlessness. His heart pounded and his vision turned scarlet against night. If the waves rose higher, they would crush him as easily as any angry sea.

But the oscillation slowed, gentled, and finally ceased. A circle of light from the port brightened the room: strange that the darkness before had appeared so complete. The ship had been spinning . . . now the patch of light remained in one place. Radu climbed to his feet. Beyond the port spun a red-orange star.

It should be yellow, he thought with a shock. It should be earth's sun. But it's a red giant.

The siren moaned to silence. Radu's shirt was soaked at the armpits, and drops of sweat ran down his sides. Footsteps hurried down the corridor, but halted outside the box room.

Radu waited a moment, but nothing happened. He opened the door and came face to face with Vasili Nikolaievich.

"What's wrong?"

The pilot gazed up at him in silence. His black eyes glittered as he searched Radu's face, and his pale skin was flushed.

"What's wrong?" Radu said again. "What's the matter?"

"How do you feel?"

"How do I feel!" Perhaps transit *did* make pilots unstable, as rumor would have it. "I feel I ought to be responding to the emergency, if you'd tell me what it is."

"The emergency is that you started to wake up in transit."

Radu stared at him, all his reactions clamped into a tight ball in his chest. His heart pounded. The pilot's pulse throbbed irregularly at the corner of his sharp jaw.

"The sensors protected you. They threw us back into normal space," Vasili said calmly. "Don't look so worried. You're all right, so apparently they worked in time."

Radu gazed down at his hands. They looked no different, but now he knew why the pilot had stared at him so intently, and why he had hesitated until Radu opened the door. They both knew how normal people died in transit.

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"How could I wake up?"

Vasili shrugged. "A mistake in the anesthetic. An obstruction in the gas line. I don't know."

He no longer sounded upset, and Radu permitted himself to relax, too. He was, after all, alive, and apparently unchanged by his experience.

"Where are we?"

The pilot shrugged again, left Radu in the hatchway, and went to inspect the information panel of Radu's body box.

"Then we're lost?"

"I haven't checked yet," Vasili said without turning toward him. "I came to see what happened as soon as I got the ship stabilized. I've never left transit quite so abruptly before."

Radu had never experienced leaving transit at all, having always gone through it sound asleep. He had wondered—as all crew members did—what he might see if he regained consciousness before he was supposed to. Now he had the evidence of his own confusion and bruises that the emergency sensors would prevent him from catching even a glimpse, at the risk of his life, of the spectacle the pilots kept so secret. If a crew member started to wake up, or slept too lightly, the sensors would always throw the ship out of transit and return it to normal space. The absolute certainty made Radu feel relieved, yet envious.

Vasili glanced at the display again. "I'll chart our position. You do a blood chemistry and check the anesthetic feeds. Do it quickly—I want to get back on our way."

He left Radu alone with the blinking machine that was supposed to protect him during flight. Radu set to work.

After several hours, his frustration increased as he looked for and failed to find any malfunction. The anesthetic, a gas, flowed smoothly and at the upper limit of concentration for someone of Radu's size and age. His blood chemistry was well within normal limits except for high readings of adrenalin and its breakdown products. He had expected that. After what had happened, low or normal levels would have been unusual.

The shreds of his dream kept distracting him. Never before had he experienced a nightmare while he was asleep in transit. This was frighteningly like his hallucinations back on Twilight, just before he had become ill.

He frowned over the blood analysis. His knowledge of biochemistry was only superficial; he had to accept the information the programs gave him. The body sometimes rejected one drug and

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had to be switched to another. That was the only suggestion the computer offered. Radu could think of no other likely supposition.

This ship carried supplies of two other transit drugs. Radu factored the second choice for stress and noted the upper dosage limit. He left the information drifting above his box, set up the equipment, and returned to the control room.

"I'm ready."

"Good," Vasili said. "Did you find the problem?"

"Reaction against the anesthetic, I think."

"That's unusual."

"It's the only explanation that makes sense." He paused. "Unless Atna was right."

Vasili snorted. "He wasn't right. Let's go."

In the box room, Radu rolled up his sleeve, exposed his wrist to the antiseptic light, and climbed into his box.

"The i.v. is ready," he said. "It works quickly so I'll wish you well now."

Vasili knelt and picked up the i.v. needle. His hand trembled, and he looked, if possible, even paler than usual.

"What's the matter?" Radu asked.

Vasili hesitated. "I'm not very fond of needles, I thought I was done with them . . ."

Though Vasili did not show his scar, Radu had seen Laenea's, and the other marks from the operations that had made her a pilot. He did not blame Vasili for his dislike of the needle.

"Can't you use another drug?" Vasili tried to smile but succeeded only in looking faintly ill.

"I'd prefer to avoid it," Radu said. The third drug, though taken by mouth, had a range of unpleasant side effects.

Vasili shook his head quickly. "Of course. I'm sorry." He took Radu's wrist in one hand, and steadied the needle.

The i.v.'s built-in topical anesthetic tingled against Radu's inner arm, then numbed the skin. Vasili uncertainly guided the needle into a vein, digging so deep that the insertion hurt. Radu gritted his teeth.

The crystalline blackness of transit sleep formed solid around him.

Radu dreamed, as always; he dreamed again of Laenea. He could feel and smell and taste her. His hand slid gently from her breast across the ridged new scar. She whispered something that he could not quite hear, that he could not quite understand, and she laughed in the wonderful soft low way she had. Her hair

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swung down and caressed his shoulder and he twined the locks in his fingers.

She whispered again. "I love you." He whispered back, "I love you." She said a few more words. He thought she said, "I need you." She leaned down and kissed him, on the lips, at his throat, on the palm of his hand. Then, suddenly, she bit him hard on the wrist, slashing tendons and arteries.

"I'm sorry," she called to him. "I didn't want to—"

She was very far away. Tears streaming down her face, she vanished. Radu struggled up, clutching at his wrist to stop the blood.

He woke expecting the dream to vanish, too, but blood ran down his hand and between his fingers. The world spun, as it had before. He scrabbled for the lock on his box and flung the lid open. The lights flickered and dimmed; the gravity pulsed in waves.

Dangling from his wrist by a crumpled piece of tape, the bloody needle dripped fluid from its point.

Radu jerked it loose and flung it away and clamped his left hand across the long gash where the needle had torn out.

Vasili Nikolaievich slammed open the door.

"What in the bloody flaming hell is happening?"

Radu managed to rise to one knee. He lurched to his feet. Vasili caught him and supported him.

"I taped the needle in!" Vasili said.

Radu took an unsteady step forward. "I tore it out myself, I think. I must have. I couldn't stay asleep. I can't—"

"You have to," Vasili said.

Vasili helped Radu bandage his wrist. The needle had missed all the tendons, but the troubling dream forced him to keep reassuring himself that he could still use his hand. The dream confused him. His dreams in transit had always been pleasant, except these two times when he had awakened.

He tried to push Atnaterta's vision from his memory. He failed.

Neither Radu nor Vasili could discover why Radu had awakened this time. Perhaps blood had clotted in the needle; if so, the clot had dislodged when Radu ripped the i.v. out. Perhaps the open tip had pressed against the inside of the vein. The computer made the same suggestion as before: drug rejection. Discomforting to have that happen twice in a row.

Radu opened the locker and took down a vial of capsules, the third transit anesthetic.

"Do you know where we are?" he asked the pilot.

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"I haven't had a chance to plot our location," Vasili said, his voice strained. He avoided Radu's gaze, but added quickly, "I'm sure I'll have a course by the time you're asleep."

All Radu could do was take the drug. He stepped into the body box, sat down, opened the vial, and poured pills into his hand. His dose was five. He counted carefully, as if it were a difficult task.

He swallowed the capsules dry and lay down. As his shoulders sank into the padding, he felt the drug begin to work.

Again, he woke from the nightmare; again, everything went wrong. He came to awareness retching and screaming, clawing at the top of his sleep chamber. Laenea cried out in his mind, and he knew that she was dying.

As so many he had dreamed about had died.

Radu saw Vasili through the thick glass above him.

"Stay asleep! Don't wake up!" The pilot's terrified voice penetrated the heavy lid. "Damn you, stay asleep!"

The latch popped open, but Radu could not lift the lid and Vasili's weight too. He fought to escape and he knew he could not succeed. He was going to faint, but the unconsciousness would not be deep enough to shield him from transit. This time, he would die.

With his last bit of strength he lurched against the chamber lid and flung it open. Struck by its edge, Vasili reeled back and fell, thudding hard against a bulkhead.

On his hands and knees beside his box, Radu coughed and panted. Bile stung sour and hot in his throat and tears of rage and frustration and relief streamed down his face. He was shaking violently.

When he finally got control of himself, he forced himself to stand. Vasili stood pressed against the wall, his hands spread on the smooth metal surface. Saying nothing, Radu went to wash his face and rinse the foul taste from his mouth.

When he glanced up, dripping, into the mirror, he was surprised that he still looked very much the same as always. His hair was more rumpled than usual. Random damp locks, darkened by the water, clung to his forehead.

What's happening to me? he thought.

In the control room, Vasili gazed into the course computer's display. He looked up, his expression troubled.

"The ship can't go through that again."

"No more can I," Radu said.

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They stared at each other, neither knowing what to say.

"Well. Maybe once more," Vasili said.

"Once more! With what? That was the last transit drug!"

"I know it's impossible to take two at once—but could you raise the dose of one of them?"

"My dose is already calculated at the threshold of toxicity. If I took more—if I woke up at all, I'd wake up as a vegetable."

Vasili glanced toward the computer display. It disintegrated and reformed into a sphere representing the ship's immediate surroundings. A star burned brightly just off center, and around it crept its inner family of planets, their sizes exaggerated, their colors enhanced.

Vasili pointed to a tiny sapphire point, the second world from the sun.

"That one—" The star dissolved through the edge of the display, the planet's image grew, and the world's parameters formed above it. "That one is habitable," the pilot said.

"No doubt you'll get a discovery bonus," Radu said.

Vasili ignored the anger and sarcasm in Radu's tone. "That wasn't what I was thinking of," he said mildly, "though for all of that you may be right." After a long silence, he continued. "With some luck," he said, "with as much luck as I have ever had at one time in my life, I'll be able to get this ship home. We went in and out of transit so fast . . . I've looked for this star. The constellations aren't mapped. We're lost. When the ship dives I may be able to figure out where we are then. There are . . . landmarks? Anomalies and patterns. I can't describe them to someone who hasn't seen them. It's hard enough to talk about them to someone who has seen them. Never mind. It doesn't matter. I'm afraid to try to take you back in there. I'm afraid to try to take you home."

Radu stared into the translucent image of the planet. "You could . . . leave me in the truck. I could wait. They're always looking at new drugs, surely they have some in test that would work." He looked at Vasili. "They'd send someone back for me—wouldn't they?"

"I've never heard of this happening before—but I'm sure they would," Vasili said quickly. "If they can, they will . . ."

"But—?"

"I could take us home fairly easily if I had this system's coordinates. I don't. The first time we surfaced out of transit the system was charted. Just barely, but I found it. The second time I had to extrapolate—and I had my fingers crossed I'd done it right. I don't even know if I did or not; we fell out too fast for me

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to get my bearings. Now . . . I don't know where we are. There's so much interstellar dust, I can't find any of the standard markers. I can't match up any of the star patterns or pulsars or anything else. This isn't an exploration ship, it isn't prepared for involved analysis. Even with an x ship, it's safest to go in small steps. We've taken a couple of very large ones." He sounded more and more tense. "Exploration isn't as easy as going down a path and then turning around and coming back. You can't do that because when you turn around it doesn't look the same. Do you see?"

"No."

Vasili lifted his hands, then dropped them, his shoulders slumping. "It's transit," he said. "I can't explain it. I shouldn't even try."

"No trail looks the same coming back, but you can still follow it. It's harder work, but you can still swim up a river after you float down."

"Not if there are rapids—that's exactly it!" His expression brightened, then went grim again. "No, it isn't. It isn't anything like that. It's . . ." He spread his hands helplessly.

"What you are telling me," Radu said, "is that since you don't know where we are, even if you succeed in returning to earth you may not be able to find your way back here."

"I'll take back all the normal space data. It should be possible to figure out where this place is."

"But you can't be sure of that."

Vasili hesitated. "I'm afraid not," he said reluctantly.

"I can stay behind in the truck and take the chance of dying of starvation or asphyxiation, or I can try to go home, and die in transit."

"There's a habitable planet—"

Radu glowered. "How stupid do you think I am? I'm a colonist! I'm not such a fool to expect to survive on a new world alone! Even if I could—why would I want to?"

"Are you such a fool to think you can survive transit?"

"I'd rather die quickly than slowly." He spoke in anger, and only then realized he meant it.

"It isn't that quick, as I understand it."

"If I stay, what are the chances that someone will ever come back for me?"

Vasili looked at the deck. "Getting home—I can't say. Maybe ten to one. Maybe a hundred. But the chances of finding my way back here, if the position can't be charted . . . that's nearly random."

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"Random!"

"I'm sorry. Transit—"

"Transit! Never mind. There is no chance at all. Nothing."

"I'm sorry!" Vasili cried. "I don't know what to tell you." He turned away, and whispered, "Maybe this is what happens to all the ships that are lost. Maybe transit spits them out and never lets them back in." He spoke like a hurt, abandoned child, and Radu saw that never getting home again was not what the pilot feared. His terror was the thought of never seeing transit again.

Radu reached out, but stopped before his hand brushed Vasili's shoulder. "You are the best pilot I've ever heard of. Even Atna never saw one better, and he was in the crew since before there were any pilots, You can take this ship home."

"What about you? Getting back here doesn't depend on me," Vasili said miserably. "Only on whether the system can be charted. What about you?"

When Radu joined the crew, he knew ships were sometimes lost. He knew people sometimes died in transit despite the drugs, and he knew that the drugs themselves could kill. Like everyone else, he had prepared himself for the possibility that he might die. His only choice now was the time and place, and where he would be buried.

"I've written my letter," he said. "There's nothing I want to add to it." He wanted to go home. He wanted his ashes to be taken back to Twilight.

Vasili nodded, without turning around.

"Then we will try . . . when you are ready."

Radu gazed through the port at the crowded stars around them, at nothing. He wanted someone to be with him if he was going to die. He wanted someone to hold his hand, to embrace him, to comfort him. He leaned against the cool clear glass.

"Do you want me to stay here?" Vasili said.

Embarrassed by Vasili's pity, and his own, Radu felt the blood rising to his face.

"I think it would be better if you didn't," he said. He wanted someone, but not a pilot—not this pilot.

"All right," Vasili said. He had waited a decent interval to agree, but relief crept into his voice. Radu did not blame him for being glad to stay away. Radu did not want to see how an ordinary person died in transit either.

The pilot took his hand out of his pocket and awkwardly laid a vial on the table.

"They give us that," he said reluctantly. "In case the ship gets

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lost and there's no chance of getting home or anywhere. If it gets too bad for you—" He stopped.

Radu nodded. A quick and easy suicide sounded tempting just now. Perhaps the temptation would overcome him.

"Will I know? How long—"

Vasili laughed sharply.

In fury, his fists clenched, Radu took a quick step toward him. Vasili held up his hands in defense. But Radu had already stopped.

"I'm sorry," Vasili said. "I'm terribly sorry. I didn't mean that the way it sounded. It's only that there's no answer to your question. You can't answer questions like that about transit."

Radu found Vasili's statement hard to believe; he thought it was just another way pilots had of keeping their secrets. But he would not beg for an answer.

"I won't start until you tell me," Vasili said.

"Just go on!" Radu yelled. "Hurry up! It's bad enough without having to wait for it." He clenched his hands around the rim of the port. After a moment, he heard the door close as the pilot went into the control room.

In the port, the unfamiliar constellations blurred and swam like the fish in the sea the last time Radu had pressed up against a thick glass wall. That time he knew he must part with Laenea. This time he did not know what would happen.

The ship vibrated against his fingers. He flattened his hands against the wall, feeling the power of the engines. Fascinated in spite of himself, he waited for whatever change would come. A drop of sweat trickled down the side of his face. He ducked his head to wipe it off on his sleeve. Unless he died instantly, he would at least have a few minutes to see what the mystery was about transit. Though he had wondered, he had never asked. It did not take much intuition or observation to discover that the pilots would not tell.

The vibration of the engines rose to a peak. Radu's heart pounded. He cupped his hands around his face, shielding the port from the room's glare. Nothing outside changed: The stars, of course, did not move. But slowly Radu did detect an alteration in the state of the universe outside. The great jeweled white mass of stars around him shifted, brightened, and intensified to brilliance so abruptly that Radu stepped back startled. He blinked, and the universe faded to gray.

Radu touched the glass with the tips of his fingers. It remained smooth and cool. But nothing lay beyond it, nothing at all. Radu strained his eyes for any hint of movement, any unusual scene,

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the embodiment of fantasies or nightmares, the perception of hidden truths. He closed his eyes and concentrated on his other senses, waiting for some revelation, or even for a warning of his own impending death.

But there was nothing.

Radu sat down again and waited. He looked at his hands, watching for the skin to age and wrinkle. But they remained the same, brown and square, peasant's hands. Despite his name, if his family included high-bred nobility, it was many generations back. His fingernails were short and rough, and sometimes he bit them.

The vibration of the engines continued, smooth and steady; otherwise Radu felt no sensation of movement. He let himself feel his time sense, which had always expanded to include wherever he was at the moment. He had never paid much attention to the ability: It was a party trick, at most an anomalous and occasionally useful convenience. He could not teach anyone else to do it, nor could he explain it.

Relativity required that time, as Radu perceived it, pass at different rates in different places. He was used to that, and he was used to feeling the changes intensify whenever he was on an accelerating ship. Here, in transit, the underlying order had dissolved into chaos. Time passed in one place at one rate, in another at another, but when he thought about the first again the hierarchy had changed. How he perceived that there was a change, he did not know. It was like being in a dark room, surrounded by moving sculptures, able to look at each piece only for a moment as a single light rested on one, blinked off, and blinked on illuminating another in a random order, at dizzying speed.

He stopped trying to sort out his perceptions and waited quietly until he regained his equilibrium. Then he focused his attention on subjective time alone. To his surprise, it felt and behaved exactly as it would have if he had been in any other place. Pilots were said to experience a perturbation of their time sense in transit, but perhaps that was the result of the normal biological rhythms they renounced to free themselves from the disparity between relativistic time in Einsteinian space, and the nonrelativistic universe of transit.

However ordinary transit felt to Radu, it was profoundly unknown, and he was in danger. He could do nothing; he could not even reassure himself. He could only wait, without knowing how long the wait would be.

So he waited, drenched in slow cold sweat, staring out the port at the infinite blank grayness. Once in a while he thought he saw

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a flash of color, but the flashes were always at the edge of his vision, and disappeared before he could look at them directly. He decided they must be his imagination.

Hugging his knees to his chest, he put his head down. Comforted by darkness, he waited.

Time passed. His mind counted it as hours, but tension made it feel like days. When he nearly dozed, he jerked awake, afraid. Why should he be afraid to sleep? He felt groggy, and the fragments of a dream swirled around him—he heard Laenea's voice—and vanished. He shook his head, stood, and paced across the crew lounge and back again.

He went down the hall and flung open the door to the control room.

At the console, the pilot stared out the sweeping forward port. The sound of the door disturbed him, or he saw Radu's reflection distorted in the glass. He spun toward him with a cry. Vasili Nikolaievich's horror gradually changed to shock. After a moment he exhaled sharply, fumbled for his breathing mask, and fitted it over his mouth and nose. He drew in pure oxygen from the tank slung over his shoulder. When he took the mask away he had composed himself.

"Do you know where we are?" Radu asked. "Are we still lost?"

The pilot gazed at him; he blinked once, exhaled again, took another breath, and answered. The faint tremor in his voice betrayed his apparent calm.

"I know where we are," he said. "I've found the way."

"How much longer do we have to stay in transit?"

Vasili breathed deeply from his mask. "I tried to explain that the question isn't answerable, we've got about the same distance still to go as we've already been, but that doesn't mean the time will seem the same." He spoke all in one breath, then put the mask back to his face. Breathing was the last normal rhythm pilots gave up in order to survive transit: they took irregular gulps of pure oxygen and exhaled only when the carbon dioxide level in their blood began to interfere with the exchange of oxygen.

"Something would have happened by now if it were going to, wouldn't it?"

"I guess so," the pilot said, "at least I think so, I'm sorry to keep saying this but I don't know because we haven't got any clear idea how things happen to normal people in transit." He paused for breath. "The ones who were still alive couldn't describe the sequences, and something that looks solid and sensible in transit

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will be something even a pilot can't explain afterwards, you'll see . . ." He ran out of breath and returned to his mask.

"I don't feel any different," Radu said, then realized what Vasili had been trying to avoid saying. "You mean there's no way to tell if something will happen to me until we leave transit."

The pilot kept the mask to his face much longer than necessary. Finally he took it away. He stretched his free hand toward Radu, as if in supplication. "I'm no expert, I haven't studied what happened in the early days, besides, nothing happened to you the times you woke up."

Radu slumped down in the other seat, resigned to more uncertainty. The pilot glanced briefly over the instruments and immediately returned his attention to the blank gray port. He breathed occasionally from the mask, but so seldom that he obviously did it only in response to real need.

"Now that you've seen it," Vasili said, "what do you think of it?"

"I beg your pardon? Think of what?"

"Transit!"

Radu frowned. "I think it's excessively dull. But if you want to invent mysteries about it, I won't tell the secret."

The pilot's expression was nearly as surprised as when Radu appeared awake and alive and unchanged.

"You mean you don't see it—you don't feel it?"

"See what? Feel what?"

The pilot flung out his arms, pointing to the viewport. "See that—and feel . . . its presence, all around you, palpable, it's indescribable, it's different for everyone."

"But there's nothing there," Radu said.

Vasili Nikolaievich did not reply for a moment. Then, "What did you say?"

"There's nothing there. A blank gray fog. No space, no stars. Just nothing."

"You see nothing?"

"Are you trying to make a fool of me? Shall I put my fantasies up there for your entertainment?" Radu spoke in anger. His fantasies were too painful even for him.

"What are you?" the pilot whispered. "Are you some disguised machine, are you being tested, am I?"

"What?" Radu almost laughed, but the pilot was deadly serious, and frightened. "I'm a human being, just like you." He stretched out his arm, and his sleeve hiked up above the bandage on his wrist. "Pilot, you've seen me bleed."

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The pilot shrugged. "Easy enough to counterfeit."

"This is ridiculous," Radu said. "Intelligent machines don't function properly in transit. Everyone knows that."

"Nor do ordinary human beings."

"If they invented such a machine there'd be no reason to keep it secret."

"Pilots would be obsolete—we may be anyway, because of you, no matter what you are, despite all the effort that's gone into making us . . . acceptable."

"This conversation makes no sense, pilot," Radu said. He could think of no gentler way to put it. "If someone went to all the trouble of making a human machine this would be a purely idiotic way to test it. And if someone made a human machine they'd choose a better face than mine to put it behind."

The pilot's tension eased slightly. "That's true," he said with childlike cruelty, "that last, at least, is true, but machine or not, you're immune to transit—you're oblivious to it!—and whatever you are, you make pilots redundant."

"I'm no pilot," Radu said. "I haven't the ability or the skills. And I haven't the desire. I'm no threat to you."

Facing the blank window, the pilot took a deep, slow breath. "Maybe you believe that," he said, his back to Radu so his voice sounded remote, "or wish you did, but you're wrong."

Radu folded his arms, glowering. "Or you could be wrong," he said sarcastically. "I still could die."

"No," the pilot said, "it will be a long time before your bones go to dust, you'll live . . . unless I kill you myself."

Astonished, Radu made no response.

"Go away," the pilot said, "please go away."

Radu left the control room, though the tortured plea asked far more of him than that.

3.

As Vasili Nikolaievich predicted, when the ship surfaced from transit, Radu did not die. He did not even notice the transition. He was sitting in the lounge, bored and tired but still unwilling to allow himself to sleep. For no good reason he was afraid to give up his consciousness, however naturally.

Once in a while he glanced at the port, but the dead gray expanse, never mysterious, grew tedious. He began to ignore it; he began deliberately to avoid looking at it. But when he nearly

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fell asleep and roused himself, startled and disoriented and searching wildly for the fragments of another dissolving dream, he stared around the room and his gaze stopped at the port. Space had returned, normal space and a pattern of widely scattered stars. Earth, very close, blue and white and brown, loomed lazily above.

The door opened behind him. Radu faced Vasili, who nodded once without smiling. As he turned away, Radu took a step forward.

"I want to call Laenea," he said.

"You can't."

"You have no right—"

"You can't, because she's out on her first transit flight." Vasili Nikolaievich closed himself into the control room alone.

Radu heard Orca trying to get up. Hurrying to her side, he helped her out of her sleep chamber. Her fingers were cold, the translucent swimming webs nearly colorless. He hugged her, stroking her neck, rubbing her sides and back to warm her. She shivered violently.

"Damn," she said. Her teeth chattered. She hugged Radu tightly, leaning her forehead against his chest. "I feel awful."

"It's all right. We're only two hours out from earth."

He held her until her shivering subsided.

Orca laughed shakily. "Thanks. I'm okay now." She drew away from him, embarrassed. "I never reacted like that before."

Radu kept on lightly stroking her arms, for she did not look fully recovered.

"Did something happen?" she asked. "Do you feel any different than usual?"

"No," he said automatically, then, trying to take back the lie, "well, yes. It was uncomfortable to wake up this time." That, at least, was an accurate statement. He wanted to tell her the truth but he was afraid to. He did not want to see the same look in her eyes that he had seen in the pilot's.

"I'm glad Atna stayed home," Orca said. "That was a hard dive. I don't know what it would have done to him. I think he was right to be afraid."

"Yes," Radu said slowly, reluctantly. "Yes. His vision was correct."

Orca went below to check out the transit engines and prepare the ship for refueling.

When he had a moment to himself in the control room, Radu tried to call Laenea, hoping she had returned from her training

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flight. But her ship was still out. As far as he could tell, it was an even bet which of them had been awake in transit first.

He hoped she had found it more interesting than he had.

She had been gone for quite a while. Radu wondered just how long training flights were meant to be. He tried to put off his worry by reminding himself that time in transit, at superluminal speeds, had no correlation with time in Einsteinian space, where all travel was slower than the speed of light. Against the six weeks that had passed on earth, Radu counted that the normal space segment of the trip to Ngthummulun had taken less than forty-eight hours, and he had been awake in transit barely a day.

"What do you plan to do?"

Radu started at Vasili's sudden appearance.

"I don't know," Radu said. "I'd planned to find another automated ship and go back out again, but—"

"You can't fly on an automated ship anymore. You'll blast it out of transit every time."

"I realize that!"

"Tell me something. Do you dislike me in particular, or pilots in general?"

"Neither," Radu said. "It's only that I react to pilots the same way pilots react to normal people when they're near."

"What!"

Radu shrugged.

"I never heard of that happening before," Vasili said.

Radu sighed. The last thing he wanted was to be told something else about himself that was unusual.

"You'll have to stay here," the pilot said.

"On Earthstation? Why?"

"You can go to earth if you want. But you can't go any farther without the cooperation of a pilot, and no pilot will let you fly until we've decided what to do with you."

"Vasili Nikolaievich," Radu said, trying to keep his tone reasonable, "something very odd has happened. We need to talk to the administrators about it—"

The pilot strode toward him with such fury that Radu backed up a step.

"And then what? If you ever got away from them—if they don't take your brain apart cell by cell to find out what makes it work—"

Radu felt no inclination whatever to laugh at the ludicrous idea.

"—you'd still have to ship out with a pilot. And if you betray

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us . . ." He let his words trail off. The threat was all the stronger for only being implied.

"Pilot, I'm not your enemy. I'm not your rival. We ought to find out if anyone else is like me. I could have caused our ship to be lost—maybe this is what happened to other lost ships."

"What to do isn't your decision."

"I think that it is."

"If you say anything to anyone without the consent of the pilots, you'll regret it."

Radu gazed down at him. "You know," he said suddenly, "Atna's premonition was right."

"Don't be absurd," Vasili said. He turned abruptly and left the room.

Radu swore under his breath. Losing his temper was a bad mistake: now he had complicated matters even more. And it had been completely unnecessary to remind Vasili of Atna's warning. He did not even know why he had done it.

Orca climbed up from the engine room and slammed the hatch shut.

"What was that all about?"

Radu hesitated, wondering how much she had heard. He had to put aside the temptation to retract his lies and tell Orca the truth. But that would put her in danger to no purpose.

"Vasili Nikolaievich was just . . . making clear the relative status of pilots and crew." Almost worse than telling a lie was inventing such a feeble one.

Orca glanced at him quizzically, but if she had more questions she kept them to herself.

After the ship docked at Earthstation, Orca and Radu worked apart and in silence to shut down the ship after transit. When he was less than halfway done, Radu heard Vasili leave. The pilot had no obligation to stay, no captain's duty to help his own crew or to turn the ship over to its next users.

By the time Radu finished work, he felt groggy. He gingerly opened the hatch to the engine room.

"Orca? Can I help?"

She climbed up the ladder. "No, I'm all done." She sat on the edge of the hatchway, rubbed her eyes, and yawned. "You look like I feel," Orca said, "and I feel like hell. Let's get out of here."

In the locker room, Orca held a wyuna up to the light, gazed into it, and put it in her dufflebag. Then she stuffed clothing, bright wrinkled bits of gold and metallic rainbows, in on top.

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Subjectively the trip had been so short that a change of clothes had hardly been necessary.

They left the ship and checked into Earthstation. Radu glanced at the shuttle schedule when Orca called it up. No seats were available until the next day. Radu clenched his fist around the handle of his dufflebag. All he wanted was to get away from Earthstation, away from the pilots, to a place where he could think.

Orca made a reservation for herself; Radu reserved a place and put his name on the waiting list for any opening, to any landing port. Orca wanted to go to North America Northwest, but for Radu it held too many memories of Laenea. He would prefer to go elsewhere.

Now, while Radu had access to the communications terminal, he tried to call Laenea again. She was still in transit. Disappointed, he signed off.

He and Orca stepped onto the moving ramp that led to the station's crew section.

"Are you going out again?" Orca asked.

"Not immediately," Radu said. "And you?"

"No. My family's having a . . . a meeting. I promised to go if I possibly could."

Radu and Orca left the ramp and entered the crew sector.

Six pilots stood in a semicircle waiting for them. Ignoring the diver, they stared at Radu. At one end of the line, Vasili Nikolaievich watched Radu coldly, as if they had never met, as if they had never spoken together civilly. Orca took Radu's hand. He grasped her strong fingers gratefully.

She stepped hesitantly forward. Repressing an urge to pull her back and flee, Radu followed. The pilots stayed in their unwavering line—and they *were* all pilots: only Vasili among them did not show a scar.

"Hello, Vaska," Orca said to him. He did not move or speak or look at her; he simply kept staring at Radu.

"Vasili Nikolaievich, I promise you—" Radu cut off his words when the pilot's expression hardened to anger.

"You're to come with us," Vasili said, and, to Orca, "Your presence won't be required."

"Who says?" Still holding Radu's hand, pulling him along behind her, Orca shouldered her way forward.

"Don't make trouble, Orca," one of the other pilots said. "This has nothing to do with you."

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"Oh? What does it have to do with? What the hell is going on?" She did not even slow down.

The pilots turned and moved with them, surrounding them again, closing in.

Radu felt his pulse quickening. He hoped it was only fear, but as the circle finished forming his heart began to pound, clenching in his chest like something trapped, sending his blood in a rush through his veins, so fast that his vision dimmed in a scarlet haze and a phantom wind roared in his ears. He stumbled after Orca, trying to calm himself, but his control was gone. He could no more slow his pulse and lower his blood pressure than he could grow a pair of wings and glide from Earthstation to earth itself. He walked faster—he tried to run but almost fell—and the pilots kept up easily. Orca glanced back at him. Radu could not speak. They were only a short way from a common room, where they would find other crew and station personnel. Radu set himself to get that far. Surely, in so public a setting, the pilots would have to leave him alone.

He stumbled again. His knee hit the metal floor hard and his fingers slipped from Orca's hand. He knelt, gasping for breath, his heart laboring. He could hear nothing but the roar of his pulse. There was nothing to hear. He raised his head slowly. The pilots stared down at him, still without speaking, fading in and out through his obscured vision.

Orca tried to hold him up. He heard her, very far away, shouting.

"Call a doctor! Damn you all, will you help!"

Radu collapsed, but the diver kept him from falling and eased him to the deck. He felt cold metal against his back, against his quivering hands. The lights above him stretched away in infinite glowing lines. He felt the vibrations of footsteps through the floor and flung his arm across his eyes. He did not want to see the pilots gazing down at him, willing him to die.

Then, almost imperceptibly, his heartbeat slowed. The pain clamped around his chest lessened, and he could breathe more easily. He let his arm fall to his side and opened his eyes. Orca knelt beside him, bending over him with her fingers at the angle of his jaw.

The pilots were gone.

"Don't move," Orca said. "I'll get help."

Somehow he managed to grasp her wrist before she stood.

"No, wait." He stopped to catch his breath. He could only fill his lungs halfway, and his fingers trembled feebly.

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"You're having a heart attack!"

Radu shook his head. "It was . . . something else."

Orca frowned. "You're nuts, I'm calling somebody. Lie down." She started away.

Radu pushed himself up and tried to stand. Orca's spangled jacket slipped from his shoulders where she had thrown it. His fingers felt numb; he had to concentrate to make them grasp it. Orca heard him, stopped, and turned back. He held her jacket out to her.

Watching him, worried, she took it and absently slipped it on. "You're all right?"

"Yes."

"What happened?"

"I react badly to pilots. I don't understand why. I think it's getting worse."

"Did they know? Did they do it deliberately?"

"I guess they did." He had, after all, told Vasili Nikolaievich.

"What did they want?"

"They wanted . . . to convince me not to tell anyone what they want."

She frowned. "All right. Forget it." She slipped his arm over her shoulders to let him lean on her. "Come on."

She helped him to the station's section of small crew rooms. Finding an empty cubicle, she unlatched the door, got him inside, and eased him down on the narrow bed.

"Want your boots off?"

"I can do it." He bent his knee, drawing one foot toward his hands as he lay flat on the hard mattress. He did not feel as if he could sit up again.

"Don't be stupid." Orca grasped his boot and pulled.

"Be careful of your hands—"

Orca gave the boot a solid jerk and it slid off. She dropped it and held up her hand, spreading her fingers so the translucent webbing showed.

"I know it looks fragile," she said. "But it isn't. It's very tough." Then she showed him a long, jagged scar between the second and third fingers of her left hand. "And it heals fast when something does happen." She grabbed his other boot and pulled it off. "Besides, it doesn't make that much difference swimming."

"Then why do you have it?" he asked, surprised.

"Because when people thought about what divers would be like, even before anybody could create us, they always imagined us

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looking like this. So that's how they designed us. We decided to stay this way."

"Are your feet like that too?" Radu never would have asked such a question if he were not so tired. He blushed. "I'm sorry—"

"I have foldover toes, like a platypus," she said. "With webs between." Then she grinned. "No, my feet are pretty much the same as anybody's, except the nails. Want to see?"

He nodded, curious, and glad she was not offended by his prying.

"There's nothing secret about being a diver, you know." She sat on the edge of his bed, pulled off her red canvas shoes, and wiggled her toes. They were long, but not abnormally so, and they were not appreciably webbed.

Radu pushed himself up on one elbow and took her foot in his other hand. Her toenails were like claws, cat claws, tiger claws, retractable and heavy and quite sharp. Orca flexed her foot and the claws extended. One dimpled the flesh of his hand, very gently.

"Good protection," she said. "You need it sometimes, in the sea. They aren't much against sharks, but then there aren't many dangerous sharks where I live." She retracted her claws and reached for her shoes.

Radu lay back on the bed as she stood up.

"Do you think they'll come after you again?" she asked abruptly.

Radu shook his head. "I don't know." His reasoning was none too clear right now; he did not want to think about pilots. He could not. Surrounded by normal space-time, he wanted only to sleep.

Orca stood gazing at the closed door, silhouetted against its dirty white surface. She shrugged, an action more like shaking off doubt than expressing it, and put her hand up against the panel to seal the room against outside intrusion. She turned around.

"I'm not so recently out of the water that I think this is a clever line. But I don't want to leave you alone tonight, and to tell you the truth I'm not anxious to be alone myself. Do you mind if I stay?"

"No," Radu said. "Of course not."

She kicked off her shoes again and dropped her spangled jacket on the floor. "Is there room? Not that there's much difference between floors and beds in these places."

"There's plenty of room." Radu moved over and Orca lay down beside him, between him and the door. He was as glad of her company as he was grateful for her concern.

She smelled like no one he had ever been close to before, cool

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and salty, like the sea's morning mist. He wondered if he smelled, to her, like forest or earth or alien ground.

Tentatively each put an arm around the other, and then they slept.

Radu struggled up out of dreams that, instead of being distinct and vivid, were jumbled and muddy, mixing Laenea and transit and homesickness and fear. He sat bolt upright, staring in the darkness toward the door, expecting it to open and reveal a line of pilots beyond.

He pushed the paranoid thought away, muttered for the lights, and looked around the tiny windowless room. Orca was gone. He was disappointed, and rather surprised, but he could hardly blame her.

Using the communications terminal in the room, he checked the status of Laenea's transit ship. It was still out. He frowned, and rechecked, but the display gave no additional information. He shut it off.

Combing his hair with his fingers and shedding his clothes behind him, he went into the minuscule bathroom and took a very long, very hot shower.

When he came out again, Orca was sitting crosslegged on the rumpled bed with breakfast spread out before her. Radu stepped back, reaching for a towel.

"I've seen naked people before," Orca said. "We hardly ever even wear clothes at home. Come and eat."

He wrapped himself up in the towel before he came out.

"I thought you'd left," he said.

"I did. But I came back."

"I mean permanently."

She stopped smiling. "I thought about it."

Radu sat on the edge of the bed. "It probably would have been better if you had."

Orca handed him a piece of fruit and began unwrapping elegantly folded paper parcels.

"You're determined not to accept any help, aren't you?"

"I'm sorry you've been involved," he said. "If I knew anything you could do I'd accept your help gladly. But the truth is I don't understand what's happened myself, or what I can do about it."

"Oh, come on. This is what you were arguing with Vaska about, back on the ship, wasn't it? As for that little production last night—you were scared, gods know so was I, but you weren't surprised."

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"I'd be doing you an injury if I told you everything," Radu said. "I'd be putting you in considerable danger."

"Look, Radu, we're crew. We don't give that up when we leave the ship."

"It would be stupid to endanger you any more!"

She shrugged. "I'm in about as deep as I can be. They'll assume I know anything you know."

Of course she was right. If the pilots saw him as a sufficient threat, they would have to believe Orca was dangerous to them as well.

Radu rubbed his face with one hand. "It's pointless," he said. "Simply pointless."

Orca crumpled a piece of wrapping paper slowly and very tightly, and dropped the wad on the bed.

4.

Radu's seat on the earth shuttle was right next to Orca's. It would have been easier if they could have changed, but the ship was full. They strapped in without speaking as the craft prepared to undock.

Radu glanced carefully up and down the aisle, noting each passenger. No one else was crew. A few, by their ease in weightlessness, were station personnel; most were tourists or other visitors.

He wished he had something to say to Orca to ease the anger and distrust he had forced between them. She sat straight and tense. He followed her gaze toward the front of the shuttle.

A pilot had just come on board. Radu's pulse rate increased.

Ramona-Teresa paused in the aisle when she reached his place. Her glance at him was milder than when she had warned Laenea not to take Radu, or anyone else not a pilot, as her lover. She nodded to Orca, and smiled at Radu, as if to say, So, my dear, you like your lovers exotic: but you should have taken my advice about pilots in the first place.

Radu looked away from her, blushing. He did not speak to her. Embarrassed, he glanced at Orca, and realized how tightly he was holding her hand. He let loose his desperate grip.

"I'm sorry—are you—?"

She flexed her fine-boned fingers. Radu feared he had crushed them.

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"I'm okay." She put her hand back in his, a gesture of trust and perhaps even of forgiveness.

"I might have broken a bone, or torn your skin—"

Her fingers clamped around his wrist, tight, cutting off the circulation, though she did not appear to be putting much effort into the grip. She squeezed, and Radu winced in pain.

"Orca—" He tried to pull away. Orca appeared perfectly relaxed, but her hand stayed still and so did Radu's.

"I keep telling you," she said coldly, "that I'm not delicate. The webs won't tear and you'd have to work at it, hard, to break my fingers. Are we friends? I thought we were starting to be, but you don't even trust what I say."

She let him go.

Radu looked at his wrist. The white impressions of her fingers slowly turned red. He would be bruised in stripes, to match the bruise that spread around the wound on his other arm. "I believe you," he said. "I won't doubt you again."

"You can think me a liar for all I care right now. But when you treat me like a surface child, or some shell that the sand or the water could smash—" She snorted in derision.

"It's just that you're so small," Radu said. "Back home . . ." He hoped he could say what he meant well enough not to offend her again. "Ever since I left home, I've been surrounded by people who seemed fragile to me. I feel as if I could hurt them without meaning to. I felt awkward around Vasili Nikolaievich, and when I helped Atna awaken, I could have been holding a songbird in my hands, his bones seemed so frail." Radu did not mention Laenea: he had never felt that she was frail, but she was unique in his mind anyway.

"I'm third-generation diver," Orca said. "That's hardly enough time for us to get decadent."

Radu rubbed the stinging marks on his arm. "I won't forget again."

The shuttle landed on the port platform late at night. Radu saw Ramona-Teresa disembarking, but she paid him no attention. Radu was puzzled. She had not been with the pilots who had confronted him. Could she be unaware of what had happened?

Radu passed his hand over his eyes and rubbed his temples. She knew. He was quite sure that she knew.

On the port deck, Orca faced Radu, serious and intense, and took his hand gently.

"When you want it, I offer my help, and that of my family.

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Come to Victoria, to the harbor, and ask after us. We aren't hard to find unless we wish to be."

"Thank you," Radu said again.

She nodded. "Come with me for a way."

Without waiting to see if he came with her, she walked toward the edge of the platform. Radu hesitated, then followed, and they walked together in silence.

At the edge of the landing platform, Orca faced the night's sea wind and breathed deeply. She put her fingers to her lips and whistled, a piercing, carrying, complex burst of sound. She tilted her head, as if listening, and then she looked out serenely over the gentle swells. Radu saw nothing in the dark waves, and all he could hear was the soft splash of water against the port's side.

Orca unfastened her spangled jacket, let it slide from her shoulders, and stripped off her net shirt. She unzipped her pants, let them fall from her narrow hips, and kicked them off along with her red shoes. Her skin gleamed in the moonlight as she paused on the edge of the dock.

"What are you doing?"

"Going home."

"You're going to swim? All the way? Won't you freeze? What about your clothes?" Now that she was actually leaving, Radu found himself gripped by a feeling of loneliness as sudden as it was unexpected, unwanted, and inexplicable.

"Everything I wanted to keep, I left in my bag. My clothes will get to crew quarters, or they won't. It doesn't matter."

"I'll take them." He bent and picked them up.

Instead of replying, Orca pointed out at the sea.

The black back of a huge animal cut the surface and vanished. A few seconds later the creature breached the water in a spectacular leap. White patches on its side shone like snow. The graceful bulk sliced the water noiselessly coming down, but at the last instant the creature slapped its tail on the water. Droplets spattered Radu's cheek.

Orca laughed. "She's playing."

"What is it?"

"My name-cousin. Orca. The killer whale. She's come to meet me." The diver's voice sounded far away, as if she were already swimming naked and joyous in the frigid mysterious sea. "She's come to take me home."

"Goodbye, Orca," Radu said.

She did not answer, and she did not hug him goodbye. She was no longer crew, but a diver. She drew back her arms, and, as she

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launched herself off the platform, flung them forward. Her long, flat dive curved down from the high deck, and she entered the water between two swells, without a splash.

Radu watched for her to surface, but saw neither Orca nor her name-cousin again.

He almost wished he could dive out into the mist, into the black and soothing sea, and swim through the solitude and silence all the way to the mainland.

He knew better. Whatever permitted Orca to swim long distances in this climate and temperature, Radu lacked. In the frigid water he would last a few minutes, a half hour with great luck. After that he would lapse into hypothermia, and then unconsciousness, and then he would die.

Shadows startled him. He turned, and saw nothing.

Of course you saw nothing, he thought. Nothing's there.

But he could not help glancing once again toward the imagined movement.

Like a ghost, Vasili Nikolaievich appeared, only his pale face visible in the darkness. Radu gasped involuntarily. The shadows behind the pilot moved: scattered light glinted off a long lock of blond hair here, a dark face there, a gray wolfstone, glowing like an animal's eye. The fog draped itself around them.

"This time you'd better come with us," Vasili said.

Radu took one step forward. "Leave me alone," he whispered. "Why don't you leave me alone?"

"Please don't argue. Everything's been decided."

"Not by me!"

"I told you before, you've nothing to say about it."

Radu panicked. He flung himself around and fled. But there was nowhere he could go, with the pilots spreading out into a semicircle around him, capturing him against the edge of the port. He glanced over his shoulder. They were coming after him, getting closer with each step. He pushed himself harder, panting with exhaustion. Being away from home was making him soft.

Suddenly, in front of him, two more pilots appeared.

Skidding on the damp deck, he stopped. He turned slowly. The blurry, backlit shapes of the pilots were all around him. When he stopped again, he faced the sea.

Radu plunged headfirst off the platform.

He would swim to the ferry ramp, he would climb up it, he would make enough noise to attract the attention of someone besides the pilots—

He hit the water.

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The cold knocked the breath out of him. He floundered to the surface, cold salt water in his mouth and nose. He sputtered and coughed and struggled against panic.

He paddled laboriously along the edge of the port. If he just kept going he would be all right. Each high swell slapped him in the face with harsh salt spray. His clothes weighed him down. He tried to kick off his boots. He failed. He lost his grip on Orca's clothes. They drifted away. He lunged for them and grabbed them. Somehow it was important to keep hold of them. Orca's jacket twisted around his arm.

His only hope was to reach the ramp before he passed out. The distance, which had seemed so short when he was running, stretching on interminably. A trick of perspective, he thought, his mind winding around the words, then losing the sense of them. A wave, rebounding from the side of the port, curled over him. He reached for the surface: he thought he knew where it was, but he stretched his arms into water like black ice, and his struggles got him no closer to the air.

A huge dark shape appeared below him. The sight of it pierced through the cold. He remembered what he had read of earth and its predators, and what Orca had said of sharks when she showed him her claws. Terrified, he flailed upward and broke the surface. He tried to catch his breath; he tried to call for help. He tried to swim harder toward the ferry ramp, but the current carried him farther and farther from the port.

The creature rose under him and he felt the turbulence of its motion. He expected slashing pain, teeth through flesh, hot blood gushing through severed arteries and veins. But he felt nothing, except the black shape pushing him. He was beyond pain, beyond panic, beyond fear. Calm settled over him. When the creature attacked, he would not feel it. He would not feel anything anymore. Radu lost consciousness.

5.

Radu struggled with another nightmare. Laenea was on Twilight, a member of the crew of the emergency ship. The crew, rather than remaining safely in their orbiting ship, had landed with the medical team. They had arrived just as Radu had begun to feel, and deny, high fever and mental dissociation, the plague's first symptoms. That was the reality. But in the nightmare it was Laenea who grew ill, and instead of her caring for him, he cared

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for her. He was afraid she would die like the others, friends and family, whom he had known would become ill but had no way to save. In the reality of the past, Laenea had saved his life. In the past of his nightmare, he saw that Laenea was dying, but refused to accept that result.

He woke, crying out.

The lights flicked on, bright enough to dazzle him. A vague shape jumped down beside him.

"Radu, are you all right?"

He recognized Orca's voice. His eyes reaccustomed themselves to the light. Orca watched him anxiously.

Radu pushed himself up and looked around. The underwater porthole and the chamber's dimensions and floor plan revealed it to be one of the ocean spaceport's sleeping rooms.

"What happened?"

"I had a nightmare, and I remembered one I thought I was having again," he said. "I thought . . ." He glanced down. His legs were unwounded, unscarred.

Orca nodded toward the porthole. In the light that dissolved through the glass into the sea, Orca's friend the killer whale glided by. Radu shivered.

"My cousin heard you," Orca said. "She thought you might be one of us, but neither of us recognized the swimming patterns. Then you started moving like you were in trouble. So we came back."

"I'm very grateful that you did."

She shrugged, then scowled. "Did they *push* you in?"

"No," he said. "They followed me. They wanted me to come with them, but . . . I declined. I don't think they intended to drive me into the water. It's only that they scared me, and I panicked."

" 'Only' scared you? Like the other time?" Orca said angrily. "They weren't even trying to help you—and by the time I got you out of the water they'd just disappeared."

"Where are they now?"

"Some of them are waiting for you. They can't come into the divers' section without an invitation. But they're waiting outside."

"I've made a very bad mistake," Radu said. "I've put you in danger but left you in ignorance. I can try to correct that, if you still want me to."

"I guess you'd better." She sounded much less eager than before to hear what he had to say.

He would not have believed the simple telling of a story could

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exhaust him so completely, but when he reached his dive from the edge of the platform he was shaking with fatigue.

"Good lord," Orca said. "Awake in transit . . . no wonder."

Radu pressed the heels of his hands against his closed eyes, trying to drive away some of the tension.

"Back on Earthstation, I tried to reach Laenea," Radu said. "But she hadn't returned from her training flight. She might be able to make the pilots understand that I'm not a threat."

"Why don't you call her again, now?" Orca said.

Radu nodded. "I will."

"I'll wait for you in the lounge," Orca said, and left him alone.

A few minutes later, in a daze, Radu rejoined the diver.

Orca's smile faded when she saw his expression.

"What's wrong?"

"Laenea's ship has been declared lost," he said. He still could not believe what he had been told when he tried once more to contact her. The training flight was meant to last anywhere from half an hour to half a day. Her ship had been gone two weeks. The transit administration would not look for it, for lost ships never were found.

For Radu, Laenea was too real to be lost. He had not yet even managed to convince himself they could never be lovers again, though he knew it was impossible. He would never convince himself she was dead. He would never try.

He thought: She *was* in danger, and I knew it. I woke up in transit because I knew it. Then he thought: It's like the hallucinations back on Twilight. Maybe they weren't hallucinations. Maybe Atna's vision was right, too. He was wrong in detail, but he was right all the same.

"Oh, Radu—" Orca took Radu's hand in a gesture of comfort, led him to a couch, and made him sit down. "I'm so sorry . . . I met Laenea, on the crew. I liked her."

"I don't believe it," he said. "I can't . . . I won't."

They sat together in silence for some minutes. If Orca accepted that Laenea was dead, she did not try to persuade Radu to bow to inevitability.

"Do you want me to leave you alone for a while? Or do you want me to stay with you?"

"I dreamed of her on the way back from Ngthummulun."

"When? How could you? We didn't have time for any real sleep."

"In transit, before I rejected the drugs. I usually dream in transit, but this time I had nightmares." His last image was of

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Laenea crying out in distress, crying out for help he could not give. He did not want that to be his last memory of her. He wanted to remember her with her head thrown back, laughing.

"Oh, gods," he groaned. He hid his face in his hands. "I thought they were hallucinations, I thought they'd stopped. Why do I dream about when my friends will die?"

Orca hesitated, then said, "You mean you dream they'll die, and they do?"

"I dream they need help, but I never know how to help them. It happened during the plague," he said miserably. "I know it sounds crazy . . ."

"Not particularly," Orca said. "But you seemed to think so, when it was Atna."

Radu drew his knees to his chest and wrapped his arms around them. "I did . . . but I didn't. I thought what happened to me was hallucination, or fever memory."

Orca stroked his arm.

"Back home," Radu said, "when people started getting sick . . . my dreams changed. After a while I began to think I knew who was going to die. I tried to warn people . . ."

"Oh, lord," Orca said.

"Yes." Radu shook his head. "It should have taught me something, but I think I learned the wrong lesson. I acted toward Atna just the way the others acted toward me."

"You can't blame yourself," Orca said. "There wasn't anything you could do back on Twilight and there wasn't anything you could do in transit. Even pilots don't look for lost ships. I'm sorry Laenea is gone, but you're the one who's in trouble now. You've got to look out for yourself."

"Why?"

"What? Do you want to just give up to the pilots?"

"That isn't what I meant," Radu said. "I mean why doesn't anybody look for lost ships?"

"Because they tried for years to find any of them, even one, and they never did. So they stopped looking."

"They can't find them because they can't communicate with them. But Laenea did need help, and I knew it."

"Radu, she's *lost.*"

"Lost—that doesn't mean she's dead. Nobody knows what it means! She could still be alive." He looked toward the door, thinking about what lay beyond the divers' quarters.

Orca followed his gaze. "You can't go out there!"

"I have to. I have to try to get them to listen to me. I dreamed

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I could help, if I only knew what to do. Now I know. I have to find her."

"What makes you think they'll believe you?"

"Nothing," he said. "They have no reason to trust me and several reasons not to. But I have to try. Otherwise Laenea and her teacher and the people in their crew will all die." He stood up. He still felt shaky.

Orca caught his arm, gripping him just hard enough to remind him of her strength.

"Why the hell did I come back for you, if you're just going to go out and let them throw you in the ocean again? I could be halfway home by now," she said. "This is just crazy."

"I don't blame you for feeling that way," Radu said. He laid his hand gently on hers, and she relaxed her grip.

"Sorry."

"Never mind," Radu said. "You're probably right, after all."

"If you believed that, you wouldn't be going out there." She followed him to the center of the diver's quarters, where a doorway led to the public elevator lobby.

"Thank you, for everything," Radu said.

"I don't guess you happen to be one of those people who think that since I saved your life I get to tell you what to do with it from now on."

"I'm afraid not," he said, then laughed. He hugged her, a little longer, a little more tightly, than if this had been a regular farewell between two members of a starship crew.

"Goodbye," he said.

"Goodbye."

He faced the door, reluctant to open it, then stepped close enough for it to sense him. It slid aside, then slid closed behind him.

The two pilots waiting for him rose. Vasili Nikolaievich, particularly, looked surprised to see him. Neither pilot appeared to have any idea what to do with him now that he had come to face them of his own free will.

"You wouldn't tell me what you wanted of me," Radu said, "so I'll say what I want of you."

Vasili scowled. "I don't think you have that choice."

Radu approached the pilots, feeling more and more tense.

"Laenea Trevelyan's ship has been lost," he said. "I can find it. That's what was happening when—"

"You . . . what?" said the other pilot. "Wait. We can't discuss

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this here." She reached out to take his arm. "Come along with us, will you?"

Radu drew back.

"I'll come," he said. "I don't mean to be rude. Your proximity is as uncomfortable to me as mine is to you."

"You think so, do you?" Vasili said.

"Shut up, Vaska," the other pilot said. "We've screwed this up badly enough already. Come on, let's go someplace where we can talk."

They all kept their distance from each other; even the two pilots walked apart. In the elevator they were forced to move closer together. As the doors slid shut Radu felt the impulse to shoulder them aside and flee. The urge was so strong that when the doors lurched open he was hardly startled.

Orca entered the elevator, letting go the edges of the sliding doors and shoving her hands deep in her pockets. Her shoulders were hunched.

"What do *you* want?"

Orca scowled at Vasili. "Since there isn't any reason Radu should trust either of you half as far as he could throw you, there isn't any reason why he should go with you and Chase all alone."

"You aren't needed."

"I will be, soon enough," Orca said. "No matter how small a ship you take, you'll need a crew of at least two to run it, and on this flight you might have a little trouble finding volunteers."

"What flight?"

"That's part of what you didn't want to talk about in the hall," Radu said.

"Oh," said Chase. "Then you'd better wait till we're more secure."

Like the divers, the pilots owned a floor of the stabilizer shaft. No one else was permitted inside who was not an invited and accompanied guest.

They entered and followed Chase through concentric rings of chambers, deeper and deeper into pilots' quarters.

In the center of their deck, in a windowless room, more pilots than Radu had ever seen before had gathered together. He recognized several who had surrounded him on Earthstation, and many he had seen in news reports, and Ramona-Teresa.

She stood up. Beneath her shirt's red lace inset, a triangle with its base at her collarbone and its point at her navel, her scar was a vivid white slash.

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"Well, Chase," she said. "Well, Vaska. You finally found him." She looked drawn and tired.

"Found him!" Orca said. "You nearly killed him twice!"

"Never mind, Orca," Radu said.

"We didn't mean to scare him, out on deck," Vasili said. "It was an accident."

"We didn't expect you to jump off the side," Chase said. "By the time we found a life ring that whale was swimming you toward the ferry dock."

"I was not anxious to be surrounded again."

"No, I guess not," Chase said. "I'm sorry, I didn't think of it that way."

Ramona-Teresa sighed with exasperation.

"Well, I apologize to you, too, then," Chase said. "None of us is exactly trained for spying and kidnapping."

"I realize that. Still, you might have handled this more gracefully. And why did you bring the diver here?"

"We didn't bring either of them," Chase said. "They brought us."

"Orca thinks she's his bodyguard," Vasili said sarcastically.

Radu felt Orca tense with anger; he curled his fingers around hers, but he doubted he could restrain her if she chose to free herself.

"As she's already saved my life twice in encounters with pilots," he said, "I'm extremely grateful to her for offering to come with me."

"Radu Dracul," Ramona said, speaking so slowly and distinctly that it was clear she would not put up with another interruption or change of subject. "It's true I . . . invited you to come to speak with us. But that was last night. Now is a bad time. A ship is lost—"

"I know. That's why I'm here. To ask you to help me find Laenea."

After the uproar—some of it laughter—died down, and Radu explained what he believed had happened to him, he had to endure an hour of skepticism, questioning, and speculations. He kept his back to a wall, and the pilots stayed farther from him than when they had been trying to frighten him. They discomforted him, but the discomfort was bearable.

At first none of the pilots believed a word he said, and then, as they began to be intrigued by the possibilities of what he told them, they asked him to repeat random bits of his story, again and again. He answered, though he refused to discuss his friend-

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ship with Laenea beyond the fact that they were friends. It was none of their business.

Ramona-Teresa, who understood that they had been lovers, hardly participated in the inquisition. She sat in a chair in the corner, watching and listening and smoking a cigar.

Clearly, something strange was going on, something that had not happened before. The speculation changed focus again and again, moving from just exactly what was happening, to why it was occurring, to the ways it might damage or benefit the pilots.

"No," Radu said for at least the tenth time. "I don't understand what relation my time perception has to my perception of transit. Probably none. I keep telling you, I don't perceive transit. But it doesn't kill me, either." The pilots, growing more and more interested, drew closer to him. Another question probed at him. He heard the inflection, but the words blended into the background like smoke into fog, and then the noise blended into the real smoke of Ramona's exceptionally foul-smelling cigar. Radu wanted to ask her to put it out but could not. He still found her as intimidating as the first time he had met her, and this was her territory. Someone else asked another question and he replied without even trying to hear or understand what had been said.

"It doesn't matter. None of this matters. All that matters is that I can find the lost ship, if you'll let me—if you'll help me. I don't think it's safe to waste time, either."

He pushed through the half-circle of pilots and fled to the farthest corner of the room, fighting to keep himself under control. He wished for a window, even one peering out into the sea. He was near crying from frustration, near collapse from the concentrated attention of all the pilots. Someone touched his arm and he flinched violently.

"Sorry," Orca said. "Are you okay? Let's go out on deck for a while." The pitch of her voice was several tones higher than usual, and when Radu took her hand, her fingers were cold.

"You're shaking," Orca said. She chafed his hands. "And I'm about to start. What *is* it about them?"

"Did anyone ever tell you about the safeguards ships carry, in case they get lost?"

"No. I don't know what you mean."

"When I knew I had no choice but to go into transit awake, Vasili gave me a vial of suicide pills, to use if whatever happened to me was too much to bear. But what they're for is if the ship gets lost and the only other possibility is starvation or asphyxiation."

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Orca hugged him, offering comfort friend to friend. "I never thought about it," she said. "I guess I just thought when you get lost, you vanish, the way it seems to the people you leave behind."

"I don't know how long she'll wait," Radu whispered. "I don't even know how long 'long' is for her, in transit. But Laenea isn't someone who holds back from—from things that need to be done." He looked across the room at the cluster of pilots. "Did you hear me, Vasili Nikolaievich?" he shouted. "Don't you remember the pills you offered me?" The pilots turned to stare at him. "Ramona-Teresa, how long do you think Laenea will wait for us? She's too proud to choose despair."

The older pilot left the group and strode toward him, stopping just before the point at which they would be able to touch if each extended a hand to the other.

"You need more patience, my boy, and so did Laenea. If she had waited to understand herself better, it's possible she and Miikala would never have been lost. Perhaps none of this would have happened."

He was ready to fight to keep her from declaring Laenea dead and gone. He started to speak but she silenced him with a quick, sharp motion of her hand.

"If we find them—" she said.

"Ramona," Vasili said angrily, "I think you're letting your personal feelings—"

She needed only a glance to silence Vasili. She shook her head, and began again. "If you find Laenea," Ramona-Teresa said to Radu, "she'll still be a pilot, and you—I don't know what you are, but if we tried to make you into a pilot, the process would kill you. Do you understand that? That part of it cannot change."

"I understand," Radu said. "I understand that she's suited to being a pilot and I am not. I understand that the transition back—"

Ramona-Teresa narrowed her eyes.

"—is seldom made successfully, and would not be attempted even if it were simple." That was as far as his pride allowed him to go. If the pilots thought he wanted Laenea to give up all her ambitions and all her dreams and destroy herself for him, then they did not understand why he loved her, or why—he believed—she had loved him.

Ramona-Teresa's expression cleared. "The patience will come with time. For now, you're right to be impatient." She turned her attention to Orca. "You know what's planned? You understand the danger?"

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"Yes, pilot, I do."

"Yet you wish to crew this ship?"

"You can hardly take someone along who doesn't know what they're getting into."

"Ah, good. You also understand that no one else must know of the attempt before we leave. The administrators—" She glanced at Radu and laughed, a clear and hopeful sound after so much silence and grim discussion. "If you think we're slow to make decisions, Radu Dracul, you should spend some time with the administrators. You will, if your mission succeeds. You'll learn patience then."

6.

Some deceit was necessary, but Ramona-Teresa had so much seniority that by the time she, Vasili, Radu, and Orca booked passage on the shuttle and returned to Earthstation, a ship waited to take her home for the leave she had requested. Anyone on the crew, and nearly all the other pilots, would have had to wait for a scheduled flight, but this was a courtesy owed to Ramona-Teresa, which she had never before demanded. It would have been refused, of course, if the administrators had known what she really planned to do with their ship. They would surely have suspected something if they had known about the extra equipment Vasili talked out of a friend in the x-team planning section.

Radu wished Vasili were staying behind. But Ramona had chosen him because, of all the pilots, he was best.

They boarded the transit ship and undocked from Earthstation. Vasili began working out a course to the transit point that had begun Laenea's training; Radu accompanied Orca to her sleep chamber. She had already prepared it. Radu hugged her, memorizing the pressure of her arms around him, the touch of her strong hands on his back. She kissed him on the throat, at the corner of his jaw. His pulse beat against the light pressure of her lips. She had not kissed him before, and Radu had time only to wonder, not to ask, if she meant more by it than the customary parting.

She pulled away from him slowly, sliding her hands along his back and his sides and grasping his forearms.

"Good luck," she said.

"I'm very glad not to be all alone," Radu said.

"A big lot of good I'll be, sound asleep, but—" She shrugged,

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stepped inside her body box, and sat down. "Take care of yourself out there." She lay back, pulled the mask over her mouth and nose, and breathed deeply. Soon her pupils dilated, and her eyelids drooped.

Radu unlaced her red shoes, slipped them off her feet, and stowed them under her sleep chamber. The boxes were of standard size, so she looked very small inside one. Radu had the momentary urge to find a blanket and tuck it in around her. Instead, he closed the lid over her and stood up.

Ramona-Teresa came into the box room as the automatic alarm chimed its warning.

"She's asleep," Radu said.

"Good. As far as the instruments are concerned, so are you." She left the room again. Radu did not take her rapid departure as an insult; she, too, had to prepare herself for transit. Neither Ramona-Teresa nor Vasili Nikolaievich could risk having their concentration or their biocontrol disturbed.

The seconds flowed away. Radu considered, one last time, what he was trying to do. It was no better than a game in which a possible solution was death, a game for which he did not know all the rules. But the prize for winning was very great, and it was too late to resign from the competition.

He spun around to face the port just in time to watch starry black space fade delicately to silver gray. He stopped moving, stopped breathing, awaiting the changes that would begin if his strange ability had only been temporary. But it was just the same as last time: nothing happened at all. He returned to the control room.

The pilots had put on their oxygen tanks and breathing masks. Vasili was watching something move across his field of view — something invisible, as far as Radu was concerned. Ramona-Teresa focused her gaze on infinity.

"I'm going to follow the flight plan Miikala filed," Vasili said, "as near as I can, anyway." He took a breath. When he spoke again, sarcasm slid into his voice. "And then I suppose you want to take over piloting."

"I don't know yet," Radu said calmly.

"You won't have much time to decide what to do, because theirs was a short flight," the pilot said, "and we can't just keep going indefinitely, or there's no telling where we'll end up." He breathed from his oxygen mask.

"Maybe that's what happened to them."

"I keep trying to make you understand how this works," Vasili

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said so angrily that he had to stop immediately and take another isolated breath. "You're all right if you know your starting point and your destination, or your start and a familiar route, you can go a little way beyond, but not indefinitely without coming out and taking a look, because you get *lost*." He turned his back on Radu and began working on the interface between the ship's computer and the computer he had liberated from the exploration team.

"Let's wait until we reach the end of Miikala's flight plan before we worry about what to do, Vaska," Ramona said mildly, then, turning to Radu, "and since if you did perceive Laenea you did it while you were asleep, I suggest you try to go to sleep now and see what happens."

"I guess I should," Radu said. He hesitated, looking out into the gray viewscreen. He felt an unreasonable reluctance to take Ramona's advice, sensible though it was. If he went to sleep and did not dream of Laenea, that would mean, to him, that she was dead.

In the crew lounge, he kicked off his boots and lay on the couch. He shifted around, trying to get comfortable, but after a while he gave up trying to force himself to sleep. He got up again.

After the past few days he should feel exhausted, but he was wide awake and restless, alert and nervous. In transit, he still felt reluctant to give himself up to normal sleep.

He rested his elbows on the narrow ledge around a porthole and stared out into the grayness. It lacked form and texture; only his imagination gave it the bright sparkles at the edge of his vision.

Perhaps he would see more if he stared long enough; perhaps it was sensory deprivation that created whatever the pilots saw.

He did not believe that.

Yet gradually, imperceptibly, the soft gray soothed him. He yawned, and he felt the wandering of his attention, the softly distracted state of mind, brought on by sleepiness. He breathed very slowly and regularly, long deep breaths with as little concentration as he could manage. He let his conscious thoughts sink down and away. The sounds of his body, his steady breathing, his strong, slow heartbeat, blended into the low vibration of the ship's engines. It was too much trouble to take the few steps to the couch, too much effort to fight the great lethargy overwhelming him. He sank down, sliding his hands along the cool glass and the muted swirls of color on the wall. He curled up on the deck,

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his back pressed into the corner's comforting solidity, his cheek resting on his arm, and, there, he fell asleep.

Radu felt cold. He shivered uncontrollably and his fingers and toes lost all feeling as he fought his way through an impenetrable snowstorm. Walking on ground that was flat and featureless, he moved slowly with his arms outstretched. He could see only as far as his hands could reach. But he encountered no obstructions, no trees, no brush, no irregularities of the land. And there was no sound: Even his footsteps were completely muffled.

The storm continued, but he could make out a faint path beneath the drifted covering.

Radu broke every rule he had ever learned about surviving in the wilderness. He was lost and he should stay still, but here he was, ploughing through shin-deep powder snow to follow a nearly obliterated path. He should stay still, so he could be found.

So he could be found: He laughed.

Seconds were the only measure of the distance that he traveled, and without thinking about it he kept track of them. The path made a right angle turn. Radu followed.

At the second turn, he stopped short.

He knew how easy it was to become confused and disoriented while lost. Without a point of reference, distance and direction were meaningless. He looked back over his track but could not see where he had turned before, and the path he had broken was rapidly filling in.

There was no way to prove it, no way even to demonstrate it to himself, but he was certain in his own mind that this third path lay perpendicular to the other two. Yet the ground was still monotonously flat, and the only dimension left over was up and down.

He turned along the third path reluctantly. It was solid and reassuring, it felt just the same; he experienced no awkward change in gravity and the snow still fell from "up."

When the fourth path appeared, perpendicular to the other three, he nearly succeeded in finding it all quite funny. When he was younger, studying elementary mathematics, he had conquered three-dimensional geometry by brute force. Four spatial dimensions had fought him to a draw; he could manipulate the formulae but not visualize what they represented. Five dimensions had ambushed him and left him so bruised he did not even have an ambition for revenge. Yet he turned onto a fifth path,

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which again lay perpendicular to all the rest, and he navigated it quite easily.

How long could this go on? He had heard of, though never studied, geometries with an *infinity* of dimensions.

His body was tiring. His brain began playing tricks, out of boredom, with imaginary sounds and imaginary lights. Radu wished for even so little of reality as the faint crinkle of heavy snowflakes falling.

In the quiet he thought he heard someone calling him.

"Laenea?"

He received no reply.

At the same time, the blizzard thinned for a moment and he could see the next turning.

He stepped gingerly onto the sixth path, and kept on walking.

It went on so long that he began to believe he had made a mistake. The indentation in the silver surface of the snow was so faint he feared he had lost it and was following an illusion. But he had kept careful watch for another turnoff. He had seen none, and at certain angles the trace before him was plainly visible. He was a good tracker, when the skill was required, back on Twilight. The path was there. The snow had piled so deeply that it slowed his pace and tired him even more rapidly than before. By his own reckoning, he had been traveling for nearly five hours. He wondered if he had been gone that long from the pilots' point of view, and, if he had, if they could tell. Perhaps he had caused their ship to become lost.

Strangely enough, the prospect bothered Radu very little.

The snow was treacherous. He slipped and fell to his hands and knees; he struggled to rise, too fast, and slipped again, falling hard and painfully. Lying flat in the snow, he could hear his heart pounding, faster and faster. The sound filled his ears and bright lights exploded into darkness before him. He flung his arms across his eyes, crying out.

Radu made himself be calm. He dragged himself back into control of his body and he forced himself to remember where he was and what he was doing. Cautiously lifting his head from his arms, he pushed himself up on his elbows. He opened his eyes, and saw the next turn: the turn into the seventh dimension.

He struggled to his feet and looked down at the seventh path. He did not know how many more of these he could face; what made it worse was that he did not know how many he might have to face.

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The voice called to him again. Despite the snow, the weight of the silence itself, Laenea's voice reached him, clear and close.

Radu sat bolt upright, wide awake, his hands flung out before him.

He blinked slowly, bringing himself back to the crew room. Shivering, he slumped against the wall and stared back at the two pilots who stood in the doorway staring at him.

"Did you call out to me?" he said stupidly.

"No," Ramona-Teresa said, "you cried out to us."

"We're near the end of the flight path, we don't have anywhere to go but back to the beginning or out into normal space," Vasili said.

Radu's absurd mental clock lurched and chirped and told him he had been asleep nearly as long as he had walked in the dream. Relating dream time to real time, or time as real as time ever got in transit, he would just be turning onto the sixth track, the longest one.

"Just keep going."

"How far?"

Radu shrugged.

Vasili scowled and stalked away.

7.

In the control room, Radu tried to tell the pilots about his dream. He started twice, and stopped twice, unable to find the right words. He tried again, fumbling to express concepts for which he had no language.

"I was walking on a path," he said. "It was very precise. Each turning was a right angle, but . . ." He hesitated, certain Vasili and Ramona would laugh at him. "Every time I started on a new path, I thought it was perpendicular to all the others. I never climbed, the ground was very flat—" He stopped again. He was not conveying information, only his own tension and confusion, and that was no way to make the pilots believe him. Besides, he knew better than anyone that dreams were images. What he needed to do was understand what the images meant. "That happened for six segments. But when I got to the turning, at the seventh, I heard Laenea. That's when I woke up," he said lamely.

Neither pilot spoke. Vasili had turned translucently pale. He looked over at Ramona. The older pilot gazed at Radu, her serenity

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shaken by a hint of shock. She bent her head down, pinching the bridge of her nose between thumb and forefinger as if she felt very weary.

"I could have misinterpreted the extra directions," Radu said in a rush.

"Not directions," Ramona-Teresa said, "dimensions."

"*Seven* of them?"

"Seven spatial dimensions in theory, six in practice, until now."

"Seventh doesn't *exist,* Ramona," Vasili said.

Ramona managed to smile. "True," she said, "nor will it until someone perceives it."

"That's a lot of philosophical bullshit, if it were there one of us would have found it, *I've* looked for it hard enough."

"Ah," Ramona said, "you've detected a flaw in the proof?"

Vasili glowered at her. "Proofs are boring."

Ramona laughed. "This is hard on your pride, it is on mine, too, believe me."

"What difference does it make?" Radu said desperately. "It isn't another dimension we're looking for—it's Laenea's ship."

"He doesn't even understand what this means," Vasili said to Ramona, in disgust.

"If we find the lost ship? I think I do," Radu said.

"Not the lost ship—seventh."

Radu frowned.

"You can navigate our galaxy with four," Vasili said, "people who perceive four are easy to find, those of us who see fifth and sixth are a little rarer, and we don't much matter anyway because sixth only reaches empty intergalactic space—it's seventh that will open up the universe."

"We haven't even finished exploring the systems in easy reach," Radu said. "What's the difference if we can get to Andromeda, or only halfway?"

"We'd be unlimited—we could follow the history of a quasar, experimental physics can catch up to the theory, the possibilities are unimaginable." Vasili turned slowly toward the viewport. "And maybe we'll even figure out just exactly what it is we're doing in here."

"All right," Radu said softly to Vasili's back. He knew he should be excited by the idea of a tremendous gain in knowledge, but it only made him feel weary and overwhelmed. "All right," he said. "I understand."

"No, you don't, you really don't," Vasili said without looking at him, "and it's all coincidence anyway."

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"Truly?" Ramona said. She watched Vasili while she breathed from her mask. He looked at her, looked away, and fidgeted. "You're willing to make yourself believe that, for your pride?"

Vasili put his own breathing mask over his face and slumped down in sulky silence.

"What you just described," Ramona said to Radu, "was a fair representation of the plan for a first training flight, in which the teacher takes the new pilot along the intersection of the hyperplane with one dimension at a time." She took a breath. "First you orient the new pilot with the normal three, then you introduce fourth, and fifth and sixth if they can perceive them." She paused to let that sink in. "As far as I can tell—assuming the usual progression, and relating your perception of time to mine of distance—you've given an accurate tracing of the path we've been following."

"I . . ." Radu shook his head.

"Yes," Ramona said, "it's a lot for us to accept, too."

"So what?" Vasili said, gesturing toward the viewport. "Can he look out there and show us where to go, to find seventh?" His tone was belligerent. "Can you even perceive fourth?"

"No," Radu said. "I can't see anything at all."

"We're still following their flight plan, but we're near the point where they should have turned back to the start, so what do we do when we get there?"

"I don't know yet," Radu said. "Please don't turn the ship. It isn't time."

"Time doesn't *mean* anything in transit!" Vasili shouted.

"It does to me," Radu said gently.

Radu searched the viewport for anything, even a depth to the faceless gray. He was so bored by it that the imaginary flashes of color increased in intensity. He wished that if he were going to hallucinate, he would at least do it in an interesting manner.

"I'm going to have to turn," Vasili said. "We're headed straight for an anomaly."

One of the bright hallucinations glimmered, not at the edge of Radu's vision but in the center, and this time it remained. He blinked, expecting it to vanish like the others.

Instead it widened, and at the same time its substance coalesced, the colors intensifying and thickening, intertwining and parting like the threads of a tapestry.

"Did you hear me?" Vasili cried. "If this is where Miikala and Laenea went, they're gone, forever, and we'll be lost, too!"

Radu stayed completely still, afraid that any motion, any glance

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away, would send the pattern to the edge of his sight, there to vanish.

"Ramona!" Vasili shouted.

"Yes, turn, quickly!"

"No, Vasili, don't!"

The younger pilot swung the ship from the shiny crazed surface. Radu lunged. He shouldered Vasili out of the way, knocking him to the deck. The controls were warm in his hands. He forced them against the whole momentum of the ship, and the lurch penetrated the artificial gravity. Radu staggered and almost fell. The enormous patch, glazed with deep color, wider and higher than the ship, opened out to receive them. It became a soap bubble, lucid, transparent, an aurora that spun curtains even more intense than those of the flaming skies of Twilight. It was a solid coruscation of curvetting fire.

Radu guided the ship straight into it.

Vasili screamed.

The transit ship shuddered. Radu expected, any moment, a breach of the hull, the shriek of escaping air, the slow end of sound. But the ship passed into the aurora, and the aurora passed into the ship. Through dimensions Radu had imagined but could not describe, the color rained upon him and passed through his skin and flesh and bones. He shivered as it touched him. He felt that he could reach out and sweep the universe up in his arms, from its beginning to its end.

For that moment, he understood what pilots knew about transit.

Radu slumped down in the pilot's chair, dazzled and confounded. Everything around him, machines and people, was surrounded by light and shadows. He rubbed his eyes, but the shadows remained.

Vasili pulled himself up from the deck, lurched at Radu, and grabbed the front of his shirt.

"What did you see? Tell me what you saw!"

Radu stared at his hand, fascinated by the multiple images, scared and exhilarated at the same time. He reached out to make Vasili release his grip, but as soon as he touched him, the young pilot cursed and snatched his hand away. Radu wanted to feel sorry for him, he wanted to feel anger toward him, but he could spare the attention for neither.

"Dammit, tell me—"

"Vasili, Radu," Ramona said softly, "look."

She pointed at the viewport.

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Don't block it out, this time, Radu thought. Don't persuade yourself that you can't see anything.

He turned, slowly, and looked where Ramona was pointing.

A set of images like broken shards of a mirror: before them lay the irregular silver and shadow twinkle of another transit ship.

Ramona took the controls. Intently, she guided their ship toward the other one.

Vasili snarled a curse and tried to pull Radu from the pilot's chair. Radu stood, gingerly testing his changed perceptions. He gazed down at Vasili, seeking out the true image among the multitude of similar reflections.

"I'd tell you what I saw if I could," he said. "Please believe me. But I haven't figured it out myself yet."

"I *don't* believe you!"

"Stop it, both of you," Ramona said angrily, "and prepare for docking."

She docked the ship noisily, messily; the two craft clanged together and the fittings locked and held as momentum and inertia combined to give an awkward spin. Without pausing to correct, she jumped up and rushed toward the airlock. Ignoring Vasili, Radu hurried after her.

He crashed into a wall, banging his shoulder hard. Tears filled his eyes, further fragmenting the multiple visions. He shook his head, scrubbing his sleeve across his eyes. The airlock started its cycle. He moved toward it, feeling his way along the passage.

Ramona stepped into the other ship. Radu hesitated. The pilot's footsteps echoed and re-echoed. He followed.

She did not pause in the darkened box room, but Radu stopped. The sensors and instrument lights gave off a vague glow. Radu bent over a sleep chamber. All he could be sure of was that it registered activity.

"Ramona, the crew member's alive," he said.

She kept on going.

"Laenea—" Radu meant to shout, but her name came out in a whisper.

He followed Ramona into the crew lounge. She stopped so suddenly that he almost ran into her, then she took a few hesitant steps, and stopped again. A body lay on the couch. The sheet covering it obscured its outlines.

Radu saw a man living, a man dead, a man decayed. He gasped, watching the transition to ashes.

Ramona drew the sheet away and gazed down at Miikala's body in silence.

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There was only grief in her expression, not revulsion or fear or surprise: she could not be seeing what Radu had seen. Miikala's body was reality for her. Radu could make sense of the rest of the images only as projections from the past, from the future, as if spatial dimensions and time had become equally accessible to him.

Radu was over being startled and he could not be repelled, for he had seen far worse deaths on Twilight. Trying not to shut himself off completely from what he had learned to see, but knowing he must simplify it or be as good as blind, Radu gradually projected each shadow back onto a single reality that he chose as best he could. The process was something like drawing a three-dimensional cube onto a two-dimensional sheet of paper, something like changing the focus of his eyes from very far away to very near.

Slowly he brought himself to a world where the shadows did not blot out the objects, a world less overwhelming to his senses. But it was not what it had been before. He doubted it ever would be what it had been before.

Ramona knelt at Miikala's side and touched his throat, seeking—surely not a pulse, but warmth, some sign of life. Radu wished he could touch her, draw back her hand, embrace her without causing her pain, for she could only find sorrow here. Miikala was dead.

Even if Miikala had committed suicide, Radu knew Laenea would not leave a crew member to wake up when the anesthetic ran out, to die horribly and alone.

He walked past Ramona and into the control room.

One hand dangling to the floor, Laenea lay sprawled in the pilot's chair, her breathing mask over her face, the instruments blinking around her. Radu approached, terrified, afraid of seeing again the transition to bones and ashes.

"Laenea?" His voice broke.

Her hand moved. He started violently at the faint sound of her fingertips brushing the deck.

And then she stretched, and pushed away the mask, and yawned. She shook back her hair, just the way she had during the few days they had been together, when he watched her awaken from a sound sleep.

"Laenea—"

She leaped to her feet, spinning around to face him, her long black hair tangled.

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"Radu!" She looked around, still half asleep and confused. "I was dreaming about you—I'm still dreaming, I must be!"

"No, this is real. We came to find you."

He began to smile; she laughed, her wonderful, open laugh of delight and surprise; Radu's smile turned into his absurd and embarrassing giggle, bubbling up with joy. They threw themselves into each other's arms, in a long, unbelieving embrace. Neither cared that one was a pilot and the other was not.

"How can you be here?" She touched the base of his throat where the pilot's scar would end, if he had one. "You aren't a pilot, but you're awake—and alive—"

"I don't know how to explain. I woke up in transit. I knew your ship was in trouble."

"In trouble—? But—" She ran out of breath, grabbed her mask, and took a deep gulp of oxygen. "Sorry, I'm not used to that yet."

"They declared your ship lost. But . . . something . . . happened to me in transit. I *knew* you were out here, and alive."

"How could they declare the ship lost? It hasn't been here very long. I mean it doesn't feel like very long. How long *has* it been?" She reached for her mask again; she was not yet proficient at conserving her breath and speaking in long single sentences, like the more experienced pilots.

"Your ship is two weeks late, and that's after they gave it the maximum for the trip itself."

She shook her head. "I suppose you understand how hard it is to keep track of time here."

"I've been told. Repeatedly."

"I only just sat down to sort things through, and to try to figure out how to get home," she said. "I guess I fell asleep. After Miikala . . ." Her voice trailed off; she glanced over Radu's shoulder. "You couldn't have come here all by yourself, surely—?"

"No. I persuaded the pilots to help me. Vasili, and Ramona-Teresa—"

"Ramona! Is she here? Where?"

"She was with me—in the other room."

"Oh, no . . ."

"What is it?"

"Miikala's in there."

"I know. I saw . . . do you see things differently, here?"

She ignored his question. "Radu, Miikala and Ramona were lovers, they've been lovers since before they were pilots." She hurried toward the other room. Radu followed.

Of course, he thought. He felt ashamed, chagrined, and stupid.

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All the clues came back to him, now that it was too late to do anything about them. Until now he had been oblivious to them, and now it was too late. He had abandoned Ramona to her grief.

She was kneeling beside the couch, staring at Miikala. Laenea knelt beside her and embraced her. Radu stood helplessly nearby.

"What happened? How did you get here? What did he mean, experimenting with a novice in the ship? Did he lose hope when you were lost? Oh, *damn*."

Laenea held her. "It was only supposed to be a training flight, that's true. We went into transit—Oh, Ramona!"

"I know, my dear." Ramona spoke softly, her eyes closed, tears heavy on her thick black eyelashes.

"But at the end of the flight, when he said we had to turn back, it was as if he'd let me sit at the controls of an airplane but never take off."

Ramona-Teresa drew back in surprise. "You saw it? You, Laenea? The first time?"

"I showed him, and then he could see it too. Just like that. So we went into it, to see what it was like. I saw—I felt—" She stopped. "I don't have the right words. He'd only started to teach me."

"Even Miikala didn't have the words for what you've done," Ramona said. Her voice shook. Her composure finally shattered. The stolid, independent pilot hid her face against Laenea's shoulder, and the younger woman held her, rocking her gently. Radu knew how the possibility of joy could intensify grief; joy was nothing when one was all alone.

"He was ecstatic, Ramona," Laenea said. "He explained what seventh would mean. We explored it a little way. I thought he was only getting tired. But then he . . . he had a seizure. A stroke. I don't know. I tried to revive him . . ." She looked away from Rámona, at Miikala's body. "I know he never felt any pain. But he'd still be alive, if I hadn't—"

"You don't know that!" Ramona said angrily. She dashed the tears from her cheeks with the back of her hand, and then she spoke more calmly. "Perhaps it *was* seventh that killed him, but you aren't to blame, you—tell yourself this isn't a bad place or a bad time for a pilot to die." She stopped, as her voice almost broke. "It's what I'll be telling myself."

She started to cry again, and Laenea kept holding her.

"Come away," Laenea said, "come away." She led Ramona from Miikala's side, back to the control room and to the pilot's chair.

"I'm all right," Ramona said. "I'll be all right."

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"Did you get into seventh?"

Radu started. Vasili stood in the shadow of the hatchway,the sharp planes of his face softened by patterns of light.

"Yes," Laenea said simply.

"You're lying!" Vasili cried. He turned and fled.

Laenea watched him go. "We're in it," she said quietly, as if he could still hear her. "We're always in it."

For the first time, for Radu, Laenea *was* a pilot. He could see the change in her bearing and her manner. Luminous, serene, she looked at Radu and touched his cheek.

It was, he feared, the last touch between them. Nothing he had done or seen could overcome the essential disharmony between pilots and ordinary human beings.

Radu covered Laenea's hand with his own. He kissed her palm, then slowly let his hand fall. She gazed at him a moment longer, nodded, and drew back as Radu, too, stepped away.

"Come on," Laenea said softly. "Let's go home." ●

MARTIN GARDNER (from page 99)

FOURTH SOLUTION TO TETHERED PURPLE-PEBBLE EATERS

No algebra is needed. Just reflect on the fact that each cut exposes two new surfaces, each a square of the same size as one of the cube's faces. Because there are three such cuts, six new square surfaces are exposed. The total surface area, therefore, jumps from six squares to 12 squares, an increase of 100 percent. In other words, the surface area precisely doubles.

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ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

The Unforsaken Hiero
By Sterling E. Lanier
Del Rey, $11.95
Hiero's Journey
By Sterling E. Lanier
Del Rey, $2.95 (paper)

All things come to he who waits, they say. And, over the years, this has proved true in science fiction and fantasy. *The Silmarillion* did finally appear; Jack Vance, after a decade, finally gave us the final two books in the "Demon Prince" series. Probably the most awaited book since those has been the sequel to Sterling Lanier's *Hiero's Journey*, a novel which appeared exactly ten years ago. This may come as a surprise to those who don't know the work; it has been out of print in this country for quite a while, and is one of those odd books that can't really be classified as a classic, but which a lot of people like a lot. In addition, Lanier is hardly prolific; there are a handful of short stories and one juvenile novel that predates *Hiero's*.

A sequel was absolutely called for by HJ; there was no way in the world to consider that this was all that could be told of the story. Though it didn't end with a cliff-hanger, the overall situation is not resolved; it is one of those in which the hero and heroine are together but hardly home free, and there were to be more adventures in their future. Rumors of the sequel kept appearing, and at one point a few years back, it was actually announced for publication. But it didn't appear, the first volume went into limbo, and one began to think of Hiero II as another of the lost books that would never happen.

Well, it has, and what a relief, finally, to see *The Unforsaken Hiero*; and almost as much to see *Hiero's Journey* available again. The time is 5000 years after nuclear holocaust. North America is a melange of semi-barbaric states; what technology that's left over or has been rediscovered is spottily distributed and regarded dubiously. Plant, animal, and human mutations are rampant, diverse, and very strange indeed.

Hardly anything new here, certainly. But Lanier has given a special flavor to this oft-used setting; it's another case of SF written very much as a fantasy,

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a rare quality when the first book appeared. The good guys, bent on restoring civilization and morality, are epitomized by our hero, Per Hiero Desteen, who is a warrior priest of the Abbeys, a religious order. They are aided by other forces, including a varied lot of the miscellaneous mutations, among which are nations of intelligent bears and beavers ("the Dam people"). Against them are ranged the forces of the Unclean, a shadowy coalition of unpleasant mutant humans with their own allies, mostly consisting of the more monstrous and nasty mutations. There are lots of psi powers going, and surprising creatures unconnected with either side to be encountered in the vast landscape which is still mostly wilderness.

Hiero's Journey, the first volume, is essentially a quest, Hiero in search of a computer or the means to make one, across the northern part of what was the U.S. and the inland sea that was the Great Lakes. In the sequel, he goes South. The black kingdom of D'alwah, the home of his mate, whom he has rescued from slavery, is being harassed by the Unclean. He is kidnapped and another odyssey develops, across the deserts of the South and north again to his home.

Like the first, it is anything but complex, and the basic situation is hardly original. There is some awkward writing in the first fifty pages or so, and I was wondering if my memories had been exaggerated; perhaps *Hiero's Journey* had been one of those books that was unusual for its time, but had been supplanted by much better works in the same vein. But then the Lanier magic started working —once Hiero gets into stride, the many and wonderful creatures he encounters in this world, and the circumstances in which they're encountered, are endlessly diverting. One, which is literally unique (Hiero finally dubs it Solitaire for that reason), is huge, powerful, and practically omniscient; its origins are a wonderful revelation. And then there are the "ghosts" which rule and feed on a hapless settlement of humans, and which turn out to be yet another mutated race of surprising charm and beauty.

There is lots of action and the imperceptive will view the Hiero books as more mindless adventure; but Lanier, despite the simplicity of structure and the occasional lack of writing polish, has that very basic quality that can only be called imagination, and has it to a faretheewell. His stories make one realize just how lacking it is in SF, and that with it even the most hackneyed concepts can be constantly renewed.

The problem is now that a

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third book is obviously called for; the Unclean are far from washed up at the end of this one. Please—not another ten years.

The House of the Lions
By L.T. Stuart
Bantam, $2.95 (paper)

By sheerest coincidence, L.T. Stuart's *The House of the Lions* bears a great resemblance to the Hiero books in many ways. It is several centuries after a nuclear holocaust, barbarism has taken over, mankind lives in the rubble of its former greatness, there are mutants galore, and the hero is a priest of a put-upon perverted version of Christianity. But there the resemblance ceases. This one lacks—you guessed it—imagination.

It all takes place on the island of Manhattan, now known as the kingdom of York. There is a brutal and mindless aristocracy, a downtrodden peasantry, and outcasts and mutants proscribed by the Church, which is in league with the aristocracy. A young priest, who rejoices in the unfortunate name of Snag, decides that the situation is not very nice, and sets out to find the legendary White Warrior, who is, according to myth, supposed to return from the Northern palace where he has holed up and make everything hunky dory again.

Nothing much lightens the tedium and unoriginality of what happens. The peasants, mutants and other outcasts, and of course, Snag, are all hopelessly nice folks, and the upper classes are all vicious and decadent (the author has a peculiarly sophomoric conception of decandent debauchery); but you can't even dignify them as good and evil; they're just dull and personalityless.

The only mildly amusing aspect of the book is strictly parochial; as a New Yorker, I was at points insularly interested in what had become of my little village. The imperial enclave of King Broncks (urgh) and his followers is Rockefeller Center (he holds court in the skating rink). The mutants and fellows, of course, live in the subways; there are enclaves at the Central, the Penn, the Square. The palace of the White Warrior is the Metropolitan Museum, lost in the jungles of Central Park. And the House of the Lions, naturally, is the New York Public Library, where the ultimate knowledge is hidden (not very cleverly, either).

People who know the city might get a smile or two from this Big Apple seediness. Otherwise, it's just one more dismal future.

Changewar
By Fritz Leiber
Ace, $2.50 (paper)

Those many people who, like

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myself, consider Fritz Leiber's *The Big Time* one of the towering modern classics of science fiction will be more than happy to know that the short stories he has written about the war of the Snakes and Spiders that extends across space and time have now been given a definitive collection. It is aptly titled *Changewar* (the primary tactic of the war is changing the realities of time) and it, to a degree, fills in some of the details that Leiber so artfully did *not* put in the novel. (*The Big Time* concerns only a handful of those involved in the Change War, in a backwater of the action, and only by implication does the reader get the staggering immensity of what's happening.) But even these further incidents *are* but incidents; don't expect any revelations as to what's going on in the upper levels of this inconceivably vast struggle.

Particularly welcome is "No Great Magic" where we are reintroduced to some of the personnel of *The Big Time* (the narrator is again poor, vulnerable Greta), this time performing Shakespeare in Central Park, of all unlikely places. Since participants in the Change War have been dragooned from all of history (the actor Sid was a colleague of Shakespeare's), anything can happen and does, including the appearance of Queen Elizabeth (the first one). Leiber's theatrical background shows well here; it's good to have an author who knows what he's talking about when writing about the arts.

(Collector's note: this collection is different from the hardcover entitled *The Change War* published some five years ago. The paperback contains a Change War story not in that volume, and drops four stories that were not relevant.)

Now for what is known in reviewing circles, for some macho reason, as a roundup (i.e., taking on a lot of books, usually with something in common), and the reason for *this* roundup (get along thar, little dogies) will become obvious as we go.

There has developed, in the past decade, a most interesting phenomenon in science fiction and fantasy publishing about which the vast majority of readers in those fields don't know, and to which very little publicity has been given. That is because the phenomenon has to do with limited editions, which are both expensive and— er — limited; this column hasn't touched on them in the past because it is certainly debatable, at best, to devote space to books that are not easily available. On the other hand, there is such a flood of these things at this point that *some* attention should be paid to them, particularly considering that science fiction

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people tend to be bibliophiles at heart. Western and detective buffs seem far more prone to regard their books as disposable objects; SF readers honestly seem to like books. So here is a brief look at what's happening in the more esoteric reaches of the field.

One of the proofs of the science fiction lover's love of books has been the history of amateur and semi-professional publishing in the genre. Back in the days when real publishers wouldn't touch "that Buck Rogers stuff," devoted fans doggedly (and sometimes ruinously) established small presses to get some of the beloved material that had appeared only in the pulpy magazine pages into book form. And some very handsome volumes were the result; so handsome that the word "amateur" is very much a misnomer.

The tradition of small presses has continued, and they have continued to publish material that the large publishers did not see as commercially feasible, at least in hardcover. Some pretty tawdry stuff has been published in this way, and some very good stuff. The volumes that resulted were more often than not fine examples of bookmaking, sometimes lavishly illustrated. (Which does not necessarily mean *well*-illustrated, of course, but the intentions were good.)

When it was realized that there were enough people out there willing to spend a little more on a book that could well become a collector's item (print runs—the amount of books published—were naturally small, so the hot ones very rapidly became collectible), a next step evolved: the even more limited edition. Sometimes this might be simply a small percentage of the regular edition hand-numbered and signed by the author (and perhaps the illustrator), sometimes an entirely separate edition, also numbered and very well bound and usually boxed, and autographed. (Which is why, in this day of word processors, authors still get writer's cramp.)

These became so successful (in the sense that publication costs were at least met—I don't think anyone has become rich off this sort of publishing) that new novels by major authors began to be issued in their first editions in this way, even if they were scheduled to appear in hardcover to start off with. (This has sometimes gotten sticky when the limited was supposed to be the first edition, but the inevitable delays endemic to the small press happened, and it appeared *after* the regular "trade" edition.)

Before you decide this is the hobby you've been looking for all your life, let me throw in a few words of caution. It can not

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only be costly, but frustrating. Tracking down who is publishing what can be a full-time occupation. Often a limited edition is out of print before it is published; this seeming paradox is explained by the fact that the publisher has limited the edition (yes, that's why it's called . . .) to, say, 1000 copies, and before it is off the press he has orders for those 1000. Therefore no more are available—it is out of print. Then the price goes up, if a copy can be found.

Most of the books that I'm going to cite here are already out of print, so there's little point in giving prices, save for noting that they were mostly published at between $25 and $60. There have been recent limited editions, to get specific, of Philip Jose Farmer's *A Barnstormer in Oz* (Phantasia) and *The Unreasoning Mask* (Putnam); Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *Oath of Fealty* (Phantasia); Peter Straub's *Floating Dragon* (Underwood-Miller); Roger Zelazny's *Madwand* (Phantasia), *Dilvish the Damned* (Underwood-Miller), and *Eye of Cat* (Underwood-Miller); and Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Compass Rose* (Underwood-Miller).

Jack Vance, who has been a special favorite of the special and limited editions crowd and probably has more of his work in such than anybody else, is represented recently by an old work, *Slaves of the Klau*, retitled *Gold and Iron, Lost Moons* (a collection), *Bad Ronald*, and *Lyonesse* (all from Underwood-Miller). (A prize of some years ago was a really handsome edition of Vance's "Planet of Adventure" tetrology, illustrated and with color frontispieces, published by Underwood-Miller. The same publisher also did a *Dying Earth*, one of those superb combinations of text and illustrations, the latter by George Barr. Here was an example of what this kind of publishing is all about.)

The big publishers got into the act when Harper did a handsome boxed edition of Robert Silverberg's *Lord Valentine's Castle*, and Holt boxed Robert Heinlein's *Friday*. There was also such an edition of Arthur Clarke's *2010: Odyssey Two* (Phantasia), the garish cover for which was much outclassed by the regular edition's. The special edition of Isaac Asimov's *Foundation's Edge* (Whispers) is *not* boxed; instead it has gilt edges. And would you believe a special edition of the novelization of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*? There was such, from Simon and Schuster, signed by Gene Roddenberry.

Why buy these expensive objects? There are several reasons. One is that there is great pleasure in having a really beautiful edition of a literary

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work one loves. (One of my favorite things in the world is an edition of *The Lord of the Rings* published in England, beautifully bound in black, silver and gold, and about an inch thick, because the paper is so fine.) Then there are those for whom well-made, handsome books are a pleasure in themselves, even if the content is not necessarily a favorite. And then there is the possible investment potential. This is a complex matter, but it does seem fairly certain that most of these books will continue to increase in value.

And then the final question: how do you get them? There are two ways. One is through a knowledgeable bookseller. The other is at the source itself; most of the small publishers will sell directly to the customer what they still have available, and will, with various degrees of efficiency, answer enquiries, or at least put your name on a mailing list for announcements of upcoming projects. (Those mentioned above: Underwood-Miller, 239 N. 4 St., Columbia. PA 17512; Phantasia Press, 13101 Lincoln, Huntington Woods, MI 48070; Whispers Press, 70 Highland Ave., Binghamton, NY 13905.)

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, % The Science Fiction Shop, 56 8th Ave., New York, New York 10014. ●

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

After the WorldCon, the Fall convention season gets into full swing. Make plans now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 envelope) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. (703) 273–6111 is the hot line. If a machine answers, leave your area code and number. I'll call back on my nickel. Send a #10 SASE when writing cons. When calling, it's polite to give your name and reason for calling right away. Look for me at cons behind the Filthy Pierre badge.

SEPTEMBER, 1983

1–5—**ConStellation.** For info, write: **Box 1046, Baltimore MD 21203.** Or phone: Baltimore Convention Center (10 am to 10 pm only, not collect). Con will be held in: Conv. Center, Baltimore MD. (if city omitted, same as in address). Guests will include: John (Zanzibar) Brunner, Dave (Lensman) Kyle, Jack (Well of Souls) Chalker. '83 WorldCon. Over $40 (join at door).

23–25—**Invention, 10 Woodlands Gardens, Glasgow, Scotland G71 8NU, UK. (041) 882–3006.** Chris ("Catchworld") Boyce, Jim Barker. Vogon poetry competition (as in "Hitchhikers Guide").

23–25—**Ad Astra, Box 7276, Sta. A, Toronto ON M5W 1X9.** Ben ("Colony") Bova, artist Ken Fletcher.

24–25—**ValleyCon, Box 1624, Fargo ND 58107.** Banquet. One of the few cons on the Northern Plains.

OCTOBER, 1983

1–2—**QuestCon, Box 1150, Gainesville FL 32602.** Joe Haldeman. Otherwise, comics/media oriented.

7–9—**NonCon, Box 475, Sta. G, Calgary Alta. T3A 2G4.** O. Scott Card. The Great White North lives.

7–10—**EarthCon, Box 22041, Beachwood OH 44122. (216) 351–1653, (313) 471–6932.** Cleveland OH. Jacqueline ("Zeor") Lichtenberg, M. Z. ("Darkover") Bradley, Kurtz.

14–16—**RoVaCon, Box 117, Salem VA 24153. (703) 389–9400.** C. Cherryh. In hotel, not school, now.

14–16—**Contradiction, % Michaels, 27 Argosy Dr., Amherst NY 14226.** Judith Merrill. Masquerade.

28–30—**NecronomiCon, Box 2076, Riverview FL 33569.** Tampa FL. Piers Anthony, Robert ("Horseclans") Adams, fans Bill Ritch & Ken Mitchroney. Alien cooking lessons, masquerade, trivia quiz.

28–30—**World Fantasy Con, Box 423, Oak Forest IL 60452.** Chicago IL. Gene (New Sun) Wolfe, Robert ("Psycho") Bloch, Manly Wade Wellman, artist Rowena Morrill. The WorldCon for fantasy fans. Theme: "60 Years of 'Weird Tales,' " the Chicago-based pulp magazine of fond memory. Emphasis is on dark fantasy (horror, sword-&-sorcery, etc.). Join at the door for $35.

NOVEMBER, 1983

11–13—**OrwellCon, Suykerbuyk, A. Vermeylenlaan 21, bus 20, B-2050 Antwerp, Belgium.** Anthony ("Clockwork Orange") Burgess, Soviet SF writer Alexander Zinoviev. Anticipating 1984.

18–20—**PhilCon, Box 8303, Philadelphia PA 19101.** The oldest science fiction con, founded 1936.

AUGUST, 1984

30–Sept. 3—**LACon 2, Box 8442, Van Nuys CA 91409.** Anaheim CA. '84 WorldCon. Membership $40.

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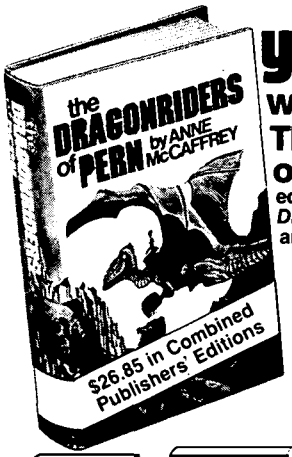

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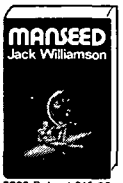

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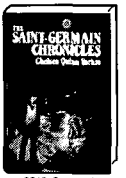

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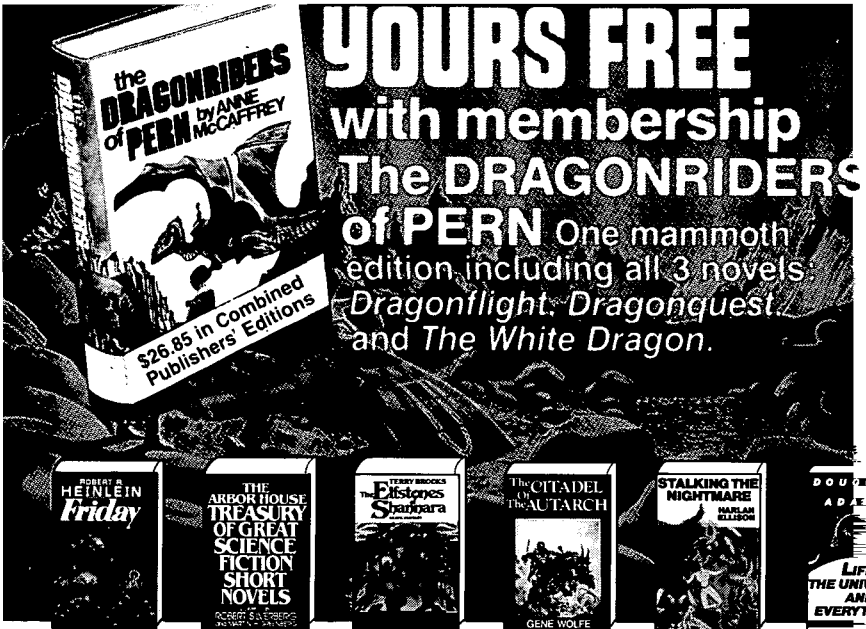
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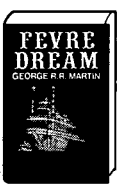

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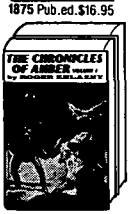

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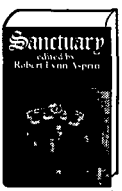

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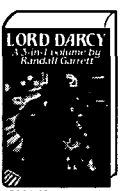

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